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AUTHOR Reed, Arthea, Ed.
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ABSTRACT

Humor in adolescent literature is the focus of the articles in this themed journal issue. The articles and their authors are as follows: (1) "Of Fiction and Madness" (Paul Zindel); (2) "Before the Immaculate Cuticles" (Jerry Spinelli); (3) "I Want To Make Them Laugh" (Ellen Conford); (4) "The Terrible Hilarity of Adolescence in 'Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!'" (M. Kip Hartvigsen and Christen Borg Hartvigsen); (5) "Choosing Issues for Reading and Writing: Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development" (Audrey T. Edwards); (6) "YA Writers on Writing" (Sylvia Vardell); (7) "What Every English Teacher Should Know about Free Reading" (Dick Abrahamson and Eleanor Tyson); (8) "Fifty YA Books Out of the Past Still Worth Reading; Or, Enjoyment Is There if You Search for It" (Ken Donelson); (9) "Non-Fiction: News from ALAN and Beyond"; (10) "Dare a Teacher Disturb the Universe? Or Even Eat a Peach? Closet Censorship: Its Prevention and Cure" (James E. Davis). Other sections include "Best Books for Young Adults, 1985" (Betty Carter); "Now That You Asked" (Ruth Cline and Elizabeth Poe); and "The Back Door" (Charlie Reed). (JD)

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The ALAN Review

Assembly on Literature for Adolescents — National Council of Teachers of English
Volume 14, No. 1 Fall 1986

A Theme Issue

Laughter As Medicine

Featuring: Paul Zindel, Jerry Spinelli and Ellen Conford

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OF FICTION AND MADNESS

A Speech Given at the ALAN Breakfast Philadelphia, November 1985

Paul Zindel
New York, New York

David and Paul Zindel

It's a great honor for me to be here with you. With my friends from Bantam and Harper & Row – all the other fine publishers and honored guests. On your seventy-fifth birthday! And I'm very happy – not jealous or envious of my colleague Sue Ellen Bridgers to whom you've given special recognition this morning. I'm not always forgotten. Your students send me fan mail. I hate authors who read letters from fans at conventions. I usually don't do it because it's such a bore and cop-out. I did receive one special letter recently I'd like to share though:

June 14, 1985

Dear Mr. Zindel,

I thought I should let you know your writing is a lot of senseless junk. I've read most of it and if I ever catch my kid reading it I'd cream her. They should put rough loonies like you in jail.

Yours Truly,

Dick Doyle

P.S. My real name is Louise Walker and I think your senseless junk is the best senseless junk I've ever read. I particularly like *The Undertaker's Gone Bananas* and I love *The Effect of Gamma Rays on Man-In-The-Moon Marigolds*. My mom was in it, and when I get older I want to be in it, too. I'm 14 right now. My favorite things to do are read, draw, act, write, laugh and disturb my teachers. When I'm a writer, I hope I can write as well as you.

With Love,

Louise

I really wanted to bring you something special today. I thought perhaps at least a lesson plan. At least a mildly subconscious reminder of the staggeringly impressive timelessness of the human behavior of story-telling. I thought that would make you especially alert during your conferences and discussions to come during this historic meeting in this particular city. But I wanted you to also know about my new book *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High*. My own book is all I could possibly be something of an expert on. And what's worse – I'm anecdotal. My fiction comes out of my life, and I imagined you'd be sleepy this early in the morning. I decided I'd better stick to my painful autobiographical experiences which for some reason always makes my

ALAN friends laugh. At least I'll know you're awake between all the munching of toast, bacon and Diet Center Wasa Crackers.

The bottom line this morning, however, is that I'm a little schizo because I've had to reawaken the energies and neurotic flights which led me to write *Harry and Hortense*. First I had a premise: **OUR GREATEST NEED IS TO FIND MEANING IN OUR LIVES.** This was a personal need for several reasons. I was in my own male menopause or climacteric. Adolescents seem to be in perpetual menopause. My symptoms were that I was depressed and burning out. UCLA had sent for me to examine my brain figuratively. I told them I was finished with autobiographical bellyaching. I told them I wanted to write about greater vistas, of heros and heroines. Themes of staggering importance. The graduate students and the professor of this special artistic brain-examination class told me that whatever I write should be based on what came before. There's no truthful escape from the artistic and personal past. But whatever I write I should be certain I can bring a level of Beauty to it. Beauty in the classic sense.

A second depression sympton was I was eating huge quantities of Baskin Robbins' World Class chocolate ice cream and pizzas with extra cheese. This culminated in my being attacked by a gypsy woman outside the Vatican last summer. For some reason she picked me out of a crowd, ran up to me and pinched my left breast fiercely. I took that as a definite omen I was getting too fat.

In order to work out my problem in fiction I decided to use Harry and Hortense as my depressed teenage protagonists. I let Harry tell the story and he starts the book by telling us:

> *Hortense and I were so depressed last term we used to get together every Saturday night to split a can of diet cola and talk about how mean most of the kids and teachers were to each other in our high school. But that was all before we met Jason Rohr, the most dynamic and exciting teenage schizophrenic we've ever known.*

Harry tells us he wants to be a writer, that he's basically goodlooking but not in the usual sense. *"I'm tall, which doesn't mean anything since a lot of famous historical people were dwarfs and they did O.K."* He works with Hortense as co-theater critic on *The Bird's Eye Gazette*. When I was a student at Port Richmond High School on Staten Island I worked on *The Crow's Nest*. My faculty advisor was Miss Conlan, an English teacher I've mentioned in other novels.

Hortense is described as wanting to be a psychologist. I based her on my wife Bonnie so I had to make her character very charming – about five foot two, with very black straight hair which she wears in bangs.

> *"She's very distinctive and told me her hair style is called the China doll style. And she has a very slightly cute nose and wears make-up that makes her eyes look like Elizabeth Taylor's as Cleopatra."*

The incident in reality which incited me to write *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* was an experience that happened when I went to a horrible play in Los Angeles. Some actress I knew from my brief six month excursion into acting lessons was in it. I quit the acting school because the middle-aged lady who ran it liked to wear very big boots and do too many improvisation exercises in which we in the class had to pretend to be prisoners in a detention camp – and she'd send her young lover of the moment in to portray a persecuting storm trooper.

At the intermission of the play I was on a line to buy a glass of wine and a few other local actors recognized me and started chatting, when I noticed, about forty feet from me in the lobby, a Ryan O'Neil-ish lookin guy, about 29, staring at me with a warm and open smile. Backstage after the show I was congratulating the actress I knew in the cast, and I was surprised to turn around and find the Ryan O'Neil guy (who I'll just call **Ryan for Reality**) coming up to me and introducing himself. He had a normal-looking girlfriend with him – nothing like one who turned up later in the chain of events to come. He knew I was a writer and wanted to know what I was working on. I told him I was planning to write a story about a hero. My first real hero. His eyes exploded. He told me he was an actor and desperately needed to find a writer because he knew the story of an incredible hero. We exchanged phone numbers and set up a meeting.

At this point when I tell an audience about these experiences I use one of two bird calls my children bought when we were in Paris last summer. One device makes a "TWEET" like a sweet little canary, and the other makes a "HONK" like a loud duck. Because the Reality of Fiction of writing this book was so intertwined I decided to clue the audience with a "TWEET" if I was talking about the Fictional areas from my book, and I sounded a "HONK" every time I was back into the REALITY of my adventures. These devices were amusing and helpful to the audience as far as I could tell.

TWEET! – In my novel this young guy became the highly pivotal character of Jason Rohr, and Harry and Hortense meet him at the high school's Spring production of *South Pacific*.

> *Anyway, suddenly there was this mysterious-looking boy with a big black dog outside on the entrance steps to the school. We had never seen him before. He was just standing there staring at us, and feeding his pet. He looked sixteen, six feet tall, and very dynamic, as though he was a star on a major soap opera.*

In my fiction I had to start hinting of all the tension and adventures to come regarding Jason. Someone is mysteriously putting up bizarre notices on the school bulletin board.

> *Attention students and teachers! I am very sad and in great despair. I noticed last week that only twenty-three parents and three teachers showed up for the PTA meeting. The Principal and Dean of Boys didn't even go. I also noticed there were no guards at four of the street entrances. Several Agents of the Devil were able to just walk in off the street and steal school supplies and a typewriter. But don't give up hope. Watch for more of my bulletins. And lift your sights to the heavens.*
>
> *Yours Truly,*
> *ICARUS, a god*

Icarus, of course is from mythology – the son of Daedalus who flew too close to the sun and the wax melted on his feathered wings and he fell to his death.

I needed to think about my characters' motivations at this point in writing. Who wanted what? What were the driving forces? The best characters are always the ones who want to get something so badly they will destroy or be destroyed to get it. I suspected I was using Harry and Hortense as my own needs. Jason was the Ryan O'Neil-ish guy from reality – someone who wanted to save the world. The school of the novel was a microcosm. Harry tells us during the course of his writing the novel that in this *"exposé"* he'll have to call his real high school *Hormone High* or everyone would know which teenage loony bin it is and the Board of Education would come after him and Hortense and make them eat three consecutive Mongolian chop sueys in the school cafeteria.

HONK! – I wanted this school to contain every madness of kids today. The schlemiels, the addicts to rock, alcohol, drugs, the truants, dropouts. A condensation of every article written about whacky kids in *Psychology Today* and *Atlantic Monthly* during the last ten years. Of course, I know a lot of teachers from my teaching days and they fed me some of the more current events from reality at their schools. For example, a teenage couple on their lunch hour had their bodies sensuously linked on a lawn across the street from Tottenville High School. The cops brought the kids into the school and they still refused to stop their passion. Also, a junior high girl student in Elizabeth, New Jersey spanked her home economics teacher with a yard stick all the way to the principal's office to make a student's arrest because the student didn't care for the amount of homework being assigned. When I was teaching, my own students threw an apple at a movie screen in the Franklin Institute.

TWEET! – So Hormone High is a fictional school, housing the pupil wildness of everywhere. I put in a few good kids and teachers, too, just to balance things.

I also wanted an antagonist who was a worthy antagonist. I picked Dean Niboff, the Dean of Boys. Harry says:

"Dean Niboff's face was a fearsome thing. He was a short man, about 55, with a booming voice, and looked just like one of those judges from a movie who condemns someone to die in a gas chamber. He also had jowls like Winston Churchill."

But I created a lot of other supernumerary villains: (1) June Peckernaw, a brazen snippy tart of a cheerleader, (2) Rocky Funiceli, the football star who usually ends up playing the sailor in the Spring production of *South Pacific*, wearing a grass skirt and a pair of half coconuts for the "HONEY BUN" number, (3) most of the lunchroom mob of students, (4) a couple of big, muscle-ridden gym teachers – (Even though most gym teachers I've known are small.), (5) Principal Greenburg, a psychotic principal I once had, (6) a 300-pound school psychologist (Why are so many school psychologists in need of Dexitrim?).

I also had to consider what the **QUEST** or **MISSION** was for my heroes and villains. I began to see that forming when I had my hero Jason Rohr tack another message on the school bulletin board:

Aristotle knew how to create a meaningful curriculum! Dean Niboff and Principal Greenburg hide in their offices and we know they don't care about us. Aristotle would never have let them into his academy at the court of Phillip the Great of Macedon. He would have tied them naked to the roof and left them for the vultures. Aristotle was a great teacher! He taught his students things they needed to know, like how to protect them from the Barbarians. He taught them the secrets of Homer and mythology, where the keys to happiness and godliness lie. No, everyone isn't o.k.! Aristotle and Socrates knew it. We're in hot water. Shape up or ship out, Dean Niboff and Principal Greenburg. I will give you one week to change your ways or you'll have to answer to me and to the spirit of Aristotle.

Signed,
ICARUS, a god

Harry and Hortense visit Jason at this dump of a house on Wild Avenue in Travis, Staten Island. They don't know he thinks he's Icarus yet, but they meet his Aunt Mo' who has 30 Great Danes in kennels in the backyard. *"She must have been a hundred years old, and she walked by means of moving one leg and then doing a little pole vault on a cane..."*

HONK! – Well, the large number of dogs comes from my reality when I was eleven and Lassie was hot. My mother wanted to get rich quick so she bought one male and one female collie and started breeding them. We ended up with 26; the only one sold was to the Empire Theater who had a Lassie Contest and a deaf and mute boy with grateful eyes was the winner. Mo' was basically an old lady dog breeder I met in California who had extraterrestrial experiences in Guatemala.

TWEET! – Harry and Hortense visit Jason's room and notice he doesn't refrigerate his butter and papaya juice. He tells them the ancient Greeks never refrigerated anything.

"You said you had a story about a hero you wanted us to write," they remind Jason.

"Oh, yes. I need you to write about a hero greater than any astronaut, president, greater than Alexander the Great or anyone you could possibly think of!"

"Who?"

"Me. I am the one. Do you understand what I'm saying?" he asks them.

"Oh, yes, We understand all right..."

HONK! – The reality of Wild Avenue when I was growing up was mysterious. I was in the fifth grade and living in Travis. Kids trapped muskrats. Boys went skinny-dipping and paid girls like Rosemary Fleiser 25 cents to get a glimpse of her charms. One family had a teenage son with a huge head. Milton, my best pal, and I got trapped in a blackberry thicket and we were bombarded by dragon flies. In fact, you can read about this area in the *1986 Ripley's Believe It Or Not Calendar* ironically for my birthdate – May 15. It tells us that the site of the world's biggest garbage dump is here on Staten Island and receives over 10,000 tons of garbage a day.

Now, the Ryan O'Neil-ish character in reality told me a story about a hero which must be written. He thought he was the reincarnation of Alexander the Great. His steady girlfriend looked like Marilyn

Monroe. She was a model – but she wore un-ironed puffy short dresses that made her look like Bo Peep with cleavage. She and Ryan were both in commercials at that time. He played a lifeguard where Taco Chips magically flew through the air. She was in something like a Cranapple ad where she spun around on roller skates in short-shorts. They both had a brilliant understanding of the psychology of their relationship which was often quite fiery; and they spent most of their days researching Alexander the Great in the archives of UCLA and attending lectures at the Jungian and Philosophic Institutes in California. Wednesdays they went to Unemployment to pick up their checks.

In fiction and real life I had to ask where the adventure was taking me – and Harry and Hortense. I had to start guessing ahead. Catch glimpses of the future and my own subconscious to imagine the "plants" I'd have to seed in order to build my story into something as meaningful and important as possible. In fiction I sensed wings from Icarus. Flight. A death. And a victory.

I had Mo' show Harry and Hortense a flying device she mentions Jason is working on.

> *In an old barn we were amazed to see a hang glider of some sort sitting in the center of the dirt floor. A lawn mower gizmo was mounted on it. The glider looked more like a junky homemade sort of thing that one really wouldn't want to do any serious sky gliding in...*
>
> *"Jason's always loved flying, you know," Aunt Mo' said.*

HONK! – I was forgetting about being depressed, and becoming quite absorbed in the mystery of Jason's madness itself. One night Ryan broke down crying in front of me and told me that when he was five-years-old he witnessed his mother being hacked to death by a maniac lover. Harry and Hortense discover a similar background on Jason when they sneak a look into the school's record room – and I had also come across a case of the same ilk when I was a chemistry teacher. Everyone was coming down hard on a student, but I took the time to really check out his records and found a similar murder. With Ryan I had agreed to become part of his pseudocommunity. The pseudocommunity he had built around him – that of a brilliant and very likeable schizophrenic. He knew every detail of Alexander the Great's life. He knew more than scholars from the universities who were astounded when he'd talk to them after their lectures – and they'd invite him to address their classes. He taught me details about the life of Greek, Roman and Persian cultures in the several centuries before the birth of Christ. He was brilliant in the areas of mythology and the origins of consciousness. He was spectacular and generous with his knowledge and wisdom, and there were many events which could be interpreted as confirmation that he was indeed Alexander the Great reborn. He was aware of the survival of a society by a re-examination of the power of archetypes. Ryan had magnificently developed an entire magical existence for himself. I traced it back to the fact that when he was five, and still in the childhood trauma of witnessing the murder of his mother – he was given a book. The power of a book. This book was on the life of Alexander the Great. His need and pain were so great, his child's mind became the book. It was a rather classic case, I suppose, but I've always felt I could understand many of the mad in this world. None of us is so distant from madness. A Dr. William Dement once said, "Dreaming permits each and everyone of us to be safely insane every night of the week."

Scholars who have analyzed my work say in every book I knock off an animal: in *Marigolds* a rabbit, in *Pardon Me, You're Stepping On My Eyeball* a racoon. In *Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* I was determined not to kill the Great Dane. I only had him slightly poisoned by the vicious cheerleader and football star – but he recovers.

In my writing I had to ask myself constantly if there was a convincing inevitability of the situation I had bitten off?

TWEET! – Jason's madness causes so much trouble at the school Dean Niboff and the authorities really have to do something about him. Jason takes over the P.A. system at one point and declares for the entire school to hear:

> *"Attention! Attention! All students and teachers! You, too, Dean Niboff. I just want to talk to you about some important things.*

Hello. Can you hear me? This is Icarus. I know you haven't wanted to believe that I am really a god, but I am. I am a special god who has sometimes been called Jason Rohr, but I know if you listen to me today, you won't laugh at me or treat me the way you did on other occasions. What you don't understand is that although I am a god, I am just a boy, too. And you shouldn't be frightened of me. I've been sent here to help you all. This time I'm not leaving until I really get things straight with you all!"

"What do you mean, they took him away? Hortense gets to ask Jason's Aunt Mo'.

"They put him back in the sanitarium again."

"What sanitarium?"

"The one on the top of the hill – Sea Vista, or something. That's where they always end up putting him away."

HONK! – In reality Sea Vista was really Sea View Hospital on Staten Island. When I was in the fifth grade it was an old age home and my class went there to jitterbug on the stage for the old folks. When I was 15 it was learned I had TB and I was sent away to a sanitorium for a rest cure at Lake Kushaqua in New York State – while ironically the miracle cure was being developed by a doctor at Sea View which had been partially converted for veteran TB patients. After the drug existed Sea View turned into Staten Island's "poorhouse" and my aunt became a dietician there. I used to visit her and watch hundreds of the old folks line up and gallop madly for seats in the dining room every meal time. They'd hit each other with crutches and all sorts of things just to create some excitement for themselves.

In the fiction of my story I had Jason escape from the sanitarium – but Harry and Hortense realize they've got to level with him. From the plotting point of view, I knew I had to find a renewal and reinforcement for the homestretch of my story. I had to really look at all my emotion and action to this point in the novel in order to at least glimpse the ending. I had Jason hide for a while at a construction site. Dynamite is soon missing from the area. I got the idea to incorporate dynamite into the story (as a threat to the school) from a high school clerk who works in Sacramento. She gave me a list of what all the crazy kids do in her school, including asking her to hold hollow apples in which they've stashed their day's supply of pot. She told me there was no way to save her school and that the only sensible thing to do was blow the whole thing up and start all over again. That would be the only way to create a school that could handle and create the values and course of study kids really need today. The system was too corrupted to repair. She was drunk when she told me this, but I found the idea exciting.

DYNAMITE – THE SENSE OF AN INEVITABILITY. And this led me to sensing an incipient conversion – the loosening of some knot in the minds of Harry and Hortense. This had to be an action rendered plausible, a change due to a new fact or motive – or possibly some hitherto untried appeal to reason and emotion. Hortense writes a letter to Jason in which she has to try to tell him the truth.

To bring reality to the mad is a difficult assignment. Madness doesn't usually change easily nor that much – which is what I found out with Ryan, as well as with Jason. I made a decision to lead him closer and closer to realize he wasn't Alexander the Great or any time-warp manifestation of him. When you hold up such mirrors you risk violence.

Now a storyteller's chief difficulty is to find a final crisis with an ending which satisfies at once his artistic conscience and the requirements of dramatic effect. The difficulty becomes the greatest as we approach reality.

TWEET! –

It didn't suddenly end, but what happened was the huge mob of students stood gaping up toward the roof of the school and all we could hear was what sounded like a small engine starting up. It was the sound of a leaf blower or lawn mower. Nearly a couple of thousand kids and teachers and other people had collected by now, and there was only the sound of this little engine which seemed to be coming from the very top of the roof. And then we began to see it . . .

So there is this crowd. Barriers. Cops. A final note tacked up by Jason – this time on the front door of

the school. The note says:

NO SCHOOL TODAY! I HAVE A LOT OF DYNAMITE!...AND I'M GOING TO BLOW IT UP!!!

SINCERELY,

ICARUS!!!

Jason flies from the roof of the school in his lawnmower-powered contraption. Dynamite blows up the record room. I couldn't bring myself, even in fiction, to blow up a whole school. I like schools far too much. Jason soars. The kids run after him. He's escaping by flight over a river toward Bayonne, New Jersey. There's a wind drift. The Bayonne Bridge from my childhood. A memory from reality of a near crash my wife and I had once in a helicopter flying under the Golden Gate. Terror buttons from past and present were being pressed in me in order to feel Jason's death as he falls.

Aristotle suggested that after the climax of a story the author should allow about a half hour for the audience to listen to the surviving characters to just sit around and chat about what became of it all.

Harry writes:

Jason Rohr had the most unusual wake and funeral of any kid who ever passed away while attending Hormone High, and certainly the most unusual of any kid Hortense and I had ever heard of anywhere. Over seventeen hundred showed up to pay their respects during the three-day wake at Pagliggini's Funeral Parlor.

In reality my first year teaching, a freshman boy in my homeroom class died from a brain tumor. The funeral parlor was on the next block from the school. The principal had teachers lead their classes over to the funeral home to pay their last respects. The boy looked very much like my own eleven-year-old son David does now. His head was bandaged in the coffin. That was the wake I gave Jason Rohr in my novel.

But there were only six of us and a dog at the actual burial in Wood Knoll Cemetery. The funeral director, a minister, Hortense and Me, Aunt Mo', the mother of the kid with the big head, and Jason's dog at the freshly dug grave.

This came from the REALITY of my own mother's funeral 17-years before. She was to be buried on top of her father in the same grave. The morning of the funeral the existing gravestone fell into the open grave cancelling the burial for that day. The next day there was just a few of us going back to the cemetery. The grave diggers and I had to carry the coffin to the grave. Three or four of us were handling a weight meant for six of eight or a machine. I almost died carrying the coffin. I was ready to hire a passersby to help – anything. It was terrible. And it was lonely.

But in my book it was now time for Harry and Hortense to have their moral peripety – that sudden dissipation of some illusion or defeat of some imposture. They had to have a crumbling of some castle in the air. Harry writes: *"I mean, there's something about what happened to Jason I don't understand. Something that makes me not want to believe in anything anymore."*

"What do you think is missing?" Hortense asks him.

"The BOON."

"The what?"

"The boon. A boon is like a prize, I told her. It's something the hero wins and brings back so the rest of the world can be better."

Finally Harry has to ask:

"What would have happened to Jason if he hadn't read about the myth of Daedlus – if he hadn't become Icarus?" **(OR IN THE CASE OF REALITY – WHAT WOULD HAVE BECOME OF RYAN IF HE HADN'T READ THAT BOOK ON ALEXANDER THE GREAT!)**

"Then he might have been no one at all," Hortense answers. And this is often the truth with many who are what we call insane. Chesterton said "Do not free a camel of the burden of his hump. You may be freeing him from being a camel."

At this point in my speech I brought forth some strange hair appendages which I affixed to my ears – and donned a partial grotesque face mask. Anything for drama!

And isn't there something in all of this that happens to many of us. To many of the young we teach. All start with the profound need to be loved. The profound fear of being worthless. A staggering love

of life. And a terrifying fear of dying. By the time we meet them in high school the kids have already begun to wear their experiences – the good and the bad – like pieces of what usually becomes a permanent costume.

At this point I removed my grotesque mask, etc.

And you and I have the same job, don't we? The storyteller and the teacher. We have to lead the kids to divest pieces of their forming madnesses, to let them see and be as much of Life as they deserve. Often, we help them see by means of. . . books.

But now for the victory! The change from gloom to exhilaration in my novel.

The ending for *Harry and Hortense* came to me in a very strange way. I was flying back from L.A. – a 747 window seat – heading for a landing at JFK. For the first time in a hundred such flights I was on a plane making its approach directly over Staten Island. I was right over my mother's grave – a thousand feet in the air – but I could look down and make out the cemetery, and I saw my characters and began to cry. That's my acid test that I've made a genuine investment of emotion in any book. As I cry I'm really quite happy because it signals me I've tapped into something truthful to me. I could see Harry and Hortense below. Harry was looking up at the plane. He caught a glimpse of himself in the future. Of himself and Hortense, he writes. . . imagining he's now in a plane passing over Jason's graveyard:

> *We were in the future looking down at our old hometown, flying over Jason's old, old grave and the graves of our parents and our teachers – and even Dean Niboff. There in the future I knew it was Hortense and I flying somewhere because we had heard a call to an important adventure – and accepted! Hortense and I were like Jason. Because of him we would go forth with amulets against the dragon forces. Hortense and I would always hear the call to adventure and we would go!!!!!*

The boon.
The insight.

They realize it is up to them to become the next heroes. The reversal. That was the gift of Jason's madness and Life. My book like most books should be a crucible for the emotions of the young readers. It should allow them a container in which to examine their own secrets and imaginations. It should be a place to invite their souls. As Emily Dickinson said, a book should not only provide them with facts, but the phosphorescence of learning.

Though my premise had been to find meaning in my own life – it's clear you and NCTE already have great meaning. You've lasted 75 years. I've lasted 12 books, thanks to you. It's also certain each of you is not afraid to go forth on a journey. No matter what your own personal problems may be, you've managed to put on clothes, shoes, socks, propelled your bodies – many from great distances – to be here this morning. Also, your presence at the conference proves you are generative. You're here to refresh and discuss and discover boons and you will bring home to your schools, colleagues and students, to give them amulets against the dragon forces. Good morning to you, and I wish you a vital conference.

PAUL ZINDEL
BIOGRAPHY AND BOOKS

Judith Bugniazet
East Carolina University
Greenville, N.C.

Paul Zindel was born May 15, 1936 in Staten Island, New York. He is married to Bonnie Hildebrand, a screenwriter, and they have three children. Zindel has had many interesting careers. He's been a chemistry teacher, playwright and author, and playwright-in-residence at the Alley Theatre in Houston in 1967.

Zindel feels that moving every two years influences his life, and probably his writing as well. The constant moving and changes have made the family very close and animal friends very dear. Their influence can be seen in his writing. For example, the racoon in *Pardon Me, You're Stepping on My Eyeball* is Marsh's closest friend.

His adolescent characters are often the only young people in an adult world. Zindel's young life

may have influenced this in his writing. When he was in high school he contracted tuberculosis and was forced to leave school and go to a sanatorium for TB patients. Although not a negative experience, he was the only young person there.

After he was released from the sanatorium he graduated from high school and went to Wagner College on Staten Island. He majored in chemistry and received a BS degree in 1958. In 1959 he received his MSC degree from Wagner and began teaching chemistry at Tottenville High School on Staten Island.

Zindel's first play "The Effects of Gamma Rays on Man-in-the-Moon-Marigolds" was produced in 1966. When Harper & Row saw "Gamma Rays" they asked Zindel to write books specifically for young people. *The Pigman*, his first young adult book, was published in 1968. The characters are realistic and the dialog reads the way adolescents actually talk. He writes for adolescents; he does not write down to them.

He writes books that are school-oriented because school is one of the most important aspects of the young adult's life. The role of parents is minimal; the stories are about adolescents, not their parents. Usually the books are told in first-person narrative style. The plots are fast-paced; the chapters are short. In other words, he writes for teenagers and gives them what they want in a book, rather than what adults think they should read.

Zindel also tries to get the reader to look at him/herself and say "Why do I feel inferior?" "Who makes me feel this way?" He tries to tell young people that they don't have to feel inferior, because they're not. According to Zindel, teenagers deserve dreams and goals. He shows his readers that life is fun, but it's not easy.

Although Zindel is very popular as a writer of adolescent novels, he considers himself to be primarily a playwright. He especially likes writing plays about women because he likes to write about "what's happening" and "women are what's happening today."

CONFESSIONS OF A TEENAGE BABOON

Harper & Row, 1977 ISBN: 0-06-026844-1
Bantam, 1978

Chris Boyd is a misfit. He's depressed, dirty and unkept and hates his mother. He also hates what she does. She's a live-in nurse for the dying. They never have their own place, they live with his mother's patients. Now he's living with another dying old lady and her violent and perverted son, Lloyd. Lloyd loves to teach kids about life, but not the kind of life they want to know about.

"THE EFFECT OF GAMMA RAYS ON MAN-IN-THE-MOON-MARIGOLDS"

Harper & Row, 1971 ISBN: 0-06-0282908
Bantam

This is a dramatic play about three generations of women. Crazy women. Nanny moves around the stage like a spectre. Beatrice lives in a dream world of what might have been. She's constantly spralled around, smoking and complaining about everything. Ruth and Tillie are her daughters. Ruth has already been put in a nut house once, and still has screaming fits and forgets to button her blouse. Tillie is the only glimmer of hope and reality. She's interested in science and likes school. She'd go to school every day, if Beatrice would let her. She loves animals, especially her rabbit, and she's trying to win the science fair with her experiment on the effect of gamma rays on man-in-the-moon-marigolds.

THE GIRL WHO WANTED A BOY

Harper & Row, 1981 ISBN: 0-06-02868-9
Bantam, 1982

Sibella Cametta has an unusual name and is an unusual girl. She's a science wiz at school. She can fix a car, install a florescent light and build a bookcase. She wants to own a gas station when she grows up. Her problem is that she's never had a boyfriend or a boy who was interested in her. With a sister and mother who are always dating someone, Sibella feels left out, and they don't help the situation. Her sister hires someone to date Sibella, and her mother is more concerned with herself than Sibella. Sibella finally decides to do something about it. She sees Dan's picture in the newspaper and decides that he's the boy for her. From then on she makes him her goal. She wants him to love her and believes she loves him, but she still has to learn the difference between infatuation and love.

HARRY & HORTENSE AT HORMONE HIGH

Harper & Row, 1984 ISBN: 0-06-02869-7

Hortense and Harry are unhappy about how mean the kids and teachers are at Hormone High. They consider Hormone High to be a real looney bin with 83 percent of the students wishing they were somewhere else. Harry and Hortense also want to be somewhere else, until they meet Jason Rohr. Jason claims to be the reincarnation of Icarus, the demigod of Greek mythology. He has an aura of greatness and magic about him. He chooses Harry and Hortense to help him spread the news that he has come back to save mankind and specifically, Hormone High. Is Jason really something special, or is he a dangerous schizophrenic? Harry and Hortense try to save this "hero" who says he's trying to save the world.

I NEVER LOVED YOUR MIND

Bantam, 1972 ISBN: 0-553-24394-2

Dewey Daniels drops out of high school and starts working at a hospital. That's where he meets Yvette Goethals. He is first attracted to Yvette's body, but he becomes attracted to her individuality. She doesn't want flowers; she wants seeds and is a vegetarian. She lives with her brother and two other men who play in her brother's band. They live with two horses in a house that had been burned out on the first floor and is condemned. Putting an end to killing and living in harmony is her goal, but she thinks nothing of stealing from the hospital by filling her bag with toilet paper and other things from the hospital supply room. She dares to be different and Dewey is attracted to that, but they are too different and Dewey has to learn to understand that.

MY DARLING, MY HAMBURGER

Harper & Row, 1969 ISBN: 0-06-026824-7
Bantam, 1971

This is a story of two couples and their love for each other. Maggie and Dennis are immature and their relationship reflects their immaturity. They have the kind of innocent relationship that's healthy for a first love. Unfortunately, they haven't learned the art of communication, and their relationship remains on a somewhat superficial level. Liz is Maggie's best friend. She's self-centered and appears to be self-assured, compared to the shy Maggie. She's dating Sean, a rich and privileged boy who mistakes sex for love. Unfortunately, Liz also believes that he loves her.

PARDON ME, YOU'RE STEPPING ON MY EYEBALL

Harper & Row, 1977 ISBN: 0-06-026838-7
Bantam

Marsh Mellow spends his study period writing lists of his loves and hates. He thinks of the world in extremes, lies constantly, even to himself, and carries a raccoon in his pocket. When he meets Edna he lies to her and she realizes it. For some reason she likes him anyway. Edna also has problems. Her parents try to push her into dating and growing up; she is paranoid about her mother constantly spying on her, and she's a 15-year-old virgin. Marsh and Edna find each other and go on a wild goose chase trying to find Marsh's father who doesn't exist. Edna helps Marsh realize that he has to face reality in order to stop all his lies.

THE PIGMAN

Harper & Row, 1981 ISBN: 0-06-026827-1
Bantam

John Conland and Lorraine Jensen are high school sophomores. They're similar in that they each come from an unhappy home life and they're lonely. Until they meet Mr. Pignati, that is. He's called the Pigman because he has a fantastic collection of pigs. Mr. Pignati is also lonely, and he and the teenagers befriend each other. Until John and Lorraine enter his life, Mr. Pignati's only friend is Bobo, a baboon at the zoo. Their friendship gets out of hand and ends tragically. Do John and Lorraine really kill the Pigman?

THE PIGMAN'S LEGACY

Harper & Row, 1980 ISBN: 0-06-026854-9

John and Lorraine think the Pigman is dead and gone from their lives forever. They visit his empty house and discover an old man living there. He says his name is Gus and he used to live with Colonel Glenville until the Colonel died. They find out that he's actually the Colonel and his dog is Gus. He's a

dying old man running away from the tax collector. John and Lorraine, with the help of Dolly (an old lady with a love of giant rhinestone earrings), show the Colonel the time of his life – and death.

THE UNDERTAKER'S GONE BANANAS

Harper & Row, 1979 ISBN: 0-06-026846-8
Bantam

When Bobby first sees his next door neighbor's eyes he knows there is something wrong with Mr. Halka. He doesn't just look strange, he acts strange. He leaves the house at all hours of the night. He keeps his three cars on three different levels in the parking lot of their 30-floor apartment building, and he collects doll houses and little antique dissection kits. At first Laurie thinks Bobby's obsession with Mr. Halka is only made up to distract her from her own obsession with death, especially when Bobby claims that Mr. Halka has killed his wife. Well – what happens if he has and Bobbie and Laurie are in his way? A very entertaining mystery.

A STAR FOR THE LATECOMER

with Bonnie Zindell

Bantam, 1981 ISBN: 0-553-22694-0

Brooke Hillary doesn't really want to be famous, but she does want to please her mother. Her mother who is dying of cancer wants Brooke to be a star before she dies. Brooke is under tremendous pressure to achieve and make her mother proud of her before it's too late. What Brooke really wants to do is love and be loved by Brandon and share time with her best friend Nancy. Nancy is moving and Brandon has a movie contract and she doesn't know when, or if, he'll be back. So, Brooke is left to become a star, before it's too late.

TO TAKE A DARE

with Crescent Dragonwagon

Harper & Row, 1984 ISBN: 0-553-25898-2

Chrysta is having trouble at home. It isn't her fault her body developed quickly. When she was only twelve, "I got these great big breasts, and suddenly I had this body that nobody knew how to deal with." On her thirteenth birthday her father called her a slut once too often and she left home. Two years later she finds herself in a pretty little town called Excelsior Springs, and she has a feeling that she'll be happy here. She finds a job in a hotel as a cook, makes friends, discovers love and finds herself. It's not easy, but she finds happiness.

NOTE: Complimentary teachers guides to the following Zindel titles are available from Bantam Books: *Confessions of a Teenage Baboon, Harry and Hortense at Hormone High* (by Mike Angelotti), *The Pigman* and *The Pigman's Legacy, The Undertaker's Gone Bananas* and *A Star for the Latecomer*. His latest book *Skunks Misery Lane* will be published by Harper & Row this fall.

READERS REACT

More "Books That Sing to the Soul"

Opal (Adapted by Jane Boulton)
Father Arcane's Daughter (Konigsburg)
JoAnn Martin
Rolling Hills Junior HS
Los Gatos, CA

Dandelion Wine (Bradbury)
Confessions of a Teenage Baboon (Zindel)
Anne Licciardello
Timberlane Regional Junior HS
Plaistow, NH

When No One Was Looking (Wells)
Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack (Kerr)
Sharron Reeman
Kidlit
West Hartford, CT

Sarah, Plain and Tall (MacLachlan)
This is really upper elementary, but it is pure poetry!
Janet D. McOuat
San Pedro, CA

To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee)
The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe (Lewis)
Listed below are titles of children's books which my secondary students have thoroughly enjoyed: (Good read alouds!)
Wreck of the Zephr (Van Allsburg)
Nightmares (Prelutsky)
Jan Fisher
Penn Manor School District
Millersville, PA

Another Heaven, Another Earth (Hoover)
Keeper of the Isis Light (Hughes)
*Circle in the Sea (Senn)
*Especially soul-singing!
Merilyn Greenhaus
Las Vegas High School Library
Las Vegas, NV

Mary Dove (Rushing)
Jane's House (Smith)
Diane P. Tuccillo
Mesa Public Library
Mesa, AZ

The ALAN Review in other publications

We believe that it will interest you to learn that (the winter 1986 issue of *The ALAN Review*) is considered a substantial contribution to the literature of education and has been processed for inclusion in the ERIC system (ED 265 567) by this clearinghouse.

Charles Suhor
Director, ERIC Clearinghouse on Reading and Communication Skills

I thought you'd be interested in the following: (from Book Sharing, *School Library Media Quarterly*, Summer 1986, pp. 194-195)

"If you are working in a middle-school or seeking titles for mature or young adult readers, steer toward *The ALAN Review*. . . .The journal is filled with scholarly and entertaining articles, interviews, and news on this non-profit organization. The Winter 1986 issue, for example, contained "A Teenager's Prayer," by the popular author Richard Peck, and articles such as "World War II and Its Relevance to Today's Adolescents," and "The South in Recent Young Adult Novels." Also featured in a special section on Sue Ellen Bridgers, recipient of the 1985 ALAN Award, along with her acceptance speech. In-depth reviews of current young adult titles bound into the journal can be clipped and filed on three-by-five index cards. . . ."

Lee Bennett Hopkins
Editor, Book Sharing

From YA Books in the Decade of the Vanished Adult by Richard Peck in Dell Carousel, Fall-Winter, 1985-86, pp. 1-2.

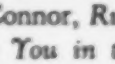
"The young of the 1980s live more remotely from their adults, and their own pending adulthood, than any previous generation. YA novels – *The Chocolate War, The Outsiders, Secrets of the Shopping Mall* – receive critical attention for their portrayals of the young grouped in isolation.

But our novels undertake another task, a corrective one, in the decade of the vanished adult. For readers who don't have to negotiate with permissive parents or teachers without authority; for readers who've been robbed of parents by the divorce rate, the long suburban commute, and the welfare system; we're giving them grown-ups as rounded book characters, as human beings.

We suggest a world shared with adults in an era of strict age segregation. We suggest – even bootleg – adult perspectives to a generation of readers who believe their own peers are the final authorities. . . .

We have our work cut out for us in this midpoint of the 1980s. However hard it is to glimpse the young they're seeing us even more dimly. The adult figures now promoted by the pop-culture media to a young audience form a suspect, motley crew: Sly Stallone as Rambo, surely the most futile hero in American lore, trying to revise the outcome of the Vietnam War by means of a headband and body-building; Big Bird, that large feather-bearing twit who hasn't taught as much literacy as was hoped; Michael J. Fox, an adult who appears not to have undergone physical puberty; and Bruce Springsteen, whom the young call the Boss because they badly need one. YA books can provide better ambassadors from the country of adulthood, and do."

Note: Richard Peck is the author of 17 novels for young people and adults including his most recent novel, *Blossom Culp and the Sleep of Death* (Delacorte, 1986). In his article he suggests the following books with strong adult characters: *Just Good Friends* by Jane O'Connor, *Running Loose* by Chris Crutcher, and *Are You in the House Alone* and *Remembering the Good Times* by Richard Peck.



BEFORE THE IMMACULATE CUTICLES

Jerry Spinelli
Phoenixville, Pennsylvania

One weekday morning several summers ago, I reached into the refrigerator for a plastic container. The container held pieces of fried chicken that I had stored from the night before. This was to be the lunch I would take to work. I removed the cover from the container. There was my chicken alright – chicken bones, and chicken ligaments, and some chicken skin. But no chicken meat.

There was no great mystery about how this had come to pass. At that moment no fewer than five children slumbered angelically in their beds upstairs. Neither was this crime unprecedented. And in form it followed perfectly.

There is something fiendish about the way a kid robs a refrigerator, especially in a multi-kid situation, where he or she is always being reminded not to "take it all," because "you're not the only one in the family." Well, this sort of appeal may tickle the youngster's conscience for a minute or two, but sooner or later he's going to open the refrigerator and see that there are three inches left in the bottle of Hires root beer. And you can almost hear the faint grinding of winches as an iron curtain descends before his conscience, and he is alone with the stark reality that if he doesn't swill down the whole three inches instantly, the next kid who happens to open the refrigerator will. So he does what he has to do.

Then comes the *really* interesting part. For you see, the kid has not, in his eye, done what we think he's done. Not exactly. We open the refrigerator, and – yes – the root beer is gone, not a drop in sight. *But the bottle is still there.* On the top shelf. With the cap on. Just as it should be. So tall and robust and so properly in the place where operational bottles live, it's hard to believe that a glassful or two isn't about to materialize within it.

But it is empty. And you'll never know which one did it. Or why. Did the drinker postulate between receptacle and contents an indivisible unity, two aspects of one entity, according to which unless one consumed *both* aspects, one could not be said to have caused the disappearance of the "root beer" *in toto*? Or was a kind of pack rat mechanism at work here, whereby the thief, in order to neutralize his guilt, leaves an object in place of the burgled item? By this reckoning, of course, the object-substitute needn't have been the bottle – anything would have served. It might be worth remembering then, that if you ever open your refrigerator and find, say, a wallet where the five brownies were, this could be what you're dealing with.

Such speculation may be exercising but is invariably fruitless, for this is that twilight zone where the adult, with all his superior powers of insight, begins to lose contact with the juvenile psyche. There are knothole moments in human affairs, moments which pass unremarked by the millions who experience them, until someone comes along who recognizes that the apparently unremarkable moment is in fact a plug, a knot if you will, which only awaits one whose hammer of insight is bold and accurate enough to punch it out, and thus create a portal to new worlds. Archimedes in the bathtub.... Newton under the apple tree....Boy George at the cosmetic counter. It seems to me that we await another Archimedes, the gifted one who shall come along and interpret for us one such knothole moment: the kid, washed in polar light, putting the empty bottle back in the refrigerator.

In the meantime, we snatch the forsaken receptacle from the fridge and toss it into the trashcan, feeling foolish for the thirsty half-an-instant when we happily saw the bottle but not its emptiness, and not a little vexed in knowing that there dwells in our house a creature so difficient in character and courage as to swipe the soda and leave the bottle.

And so I threw away my chicken bones and bought my lunch in the company cafeteria that day. And after lunch I started to write about the morning's episode. I had tossed the bones away as the

adult, but now I wrote through the eyes of the culprit:

> *One by one my stepfather took the chicken bones out of the bag and laid them on the kitchen table. He laid them down real neat. In a row. Five of them. Two leg bones, two wing bones, one thigh bone.*
>
> *And bones is all they were. There wasn't a speck of meat on them.*
>
> *Was this really happening? Did my stepfather really drag me out of bed at seven o'clock in the morning on my summer vacation so I could stand in the kitchen in my underpants and stare down at a row of chicken bones?*

I didn't know it at the time, but I had begun to write my first published novel. And what would turn out to be equally surprising, to me at least, was the fact that the manuscript would become something that at that time I had never even heard of: a *young adult* novel. I thought I was writing a book for adults – *adult* adults – but because the narrator/protagonist was a 13-year-old boy, it wound up in the children's department.

At first I think I regretted that. I don't anymore. I've taken a longer, more deliberate look at kids, and I've discovered that they'd make just fine grist for my mill. Especially the kid just hitting double-digits, the pubescent, that metamorphic creature who's showing just enough leg to shed the name of tadpole, but who is still hauling around too much tail to qualify for full froghood.

Such kids are nothing – and everything. We grownups call ourselves versatile, if we can mow the grass and heat a can of soup in the same day. We're strapped to our careers. Overspecialized. But a kid – well, being a kid is a career in and of itself. Or rather, it's a hundred careers, all going at once. One minute you're chairman of the board of Garter Snakes Amalgamated, and the next minute you're hurtling yourself, your bike and your Right Stuff down Duko Hill in an attempt to become the first Schwinn to ever go supersonic.

The job-hopping is notorious, but no wonder, with such a piñata of job descriptions dangling in front of you: lightening bug-bottler, cedar chest-smeller, puppy-holder, hole-digger, railroad car-counter, mixing bowl-cleaner, wishbone-puller, snowball-smoother, paper bag-popper, best part-saver, flying geese-watcher, elephant-feeder – man oh man, so many things to be, and you can be them all, if only you can get your homework done in study hall and you don't get called in for dinner too soon.

These are the constraints, the barriers to progress and diversification – homework and dinner-call and, maybe, every other year, a killer case of poison ivy. Other than that, it's a four-lane bike trail all the way. Mortality?....What's that? A new rock group? And so Sean, our 11-year-old, has mapped out his future: he will be a college student, a sailor, a physician, a computer engineer and a holy man. In his spare time he also intends – not hopes but intends – to break Henry Aaron's record of 755 homeruns in a Major League career.

Am I going to tell him it can't be done? Are you?

If I had to represent a lifetime spacially, I would draw a star. A sun. To view this sun ordinarily would be to see nothing but its brilliance, which is to say, the predominant duration and impact and sheer weight of the adult years. Then I would pass a moon across the face of this sun, blotting out the blinding bulk of it, and making visible what we could not perceive before: the corona. The veiled halo. The child years. And it is in this fringe, feathered atom-thin across the sky, that we are able to make out all the subtle colors and shadings that comprise the shining star itself.

Buddy Brathwaite was a co-conspirator of mine back in the railroad tightrope-walking days, and one of the neatest kids I ever knew. He could split wood with his two-fingered whistle, spit between his front teeth, find a salamander under a rock on the first try and walk into The Dump, where the rats were, in his bare feet. He could crack ten twin popsicles ten times in a row and never be left with three-quarters in one hand and one-quarter in the other. His eyes were always scanning the gutters, searching for silver-colored chewing gum wrappers. He was making them into a ball that he said would someday be big and heavy enough to steamroller down the street and squash Ginny Sukoloski's vicious, dungaree-nipping pet duck like a bug. He was a genius. He disappeared from my life some-

where back in junior high school. Just drifted off into the crowd. It was several years before I realized he was gone for good.

I heard from Buddy Brathwaite this past summer. We had recently moved, and as new mortgage-holders, our name popped up on certain mailing lists. Buddy recognized it and called. I couldn't believe it. My pal form the dead-end days! I could almost feel the warm steel rail under my foot. He was working for a company, he said. He wondered if I had enough insurance....

Suddenly I could see him perfectly through the telephone: the blow-dried hair, the immaculate cuticles, *socks*. We hung up after less than five minutes – I couldn't bring myself to ask how big his silver-wrapped ball had grown – but that was time enough to discover something I never would have believed thirty years ago: Buddy Brathwaite had become boring.

But let's not be too hard on Buddy. Compared to the hut-building, gutter-rummaging, chew-the-pegging characters we used to be, most of us have turned out to be pretty boring. Each of us, in our kidhoods, was a Huckleberry Finn, drifting on a current that seemed torturously slow at times, poling for the shore to check out every slightest glimmer in the trees – the taste of brussels sprouts....the first forward roll....cruising a mall without a parent....a curse word....making your own grilled cheese sandwich....the weird way you felt when Sally Duffy was scrunched next to you in the mob coming out of the movie – the thousand landfalls of our adolescence. And the current flows faster and faster, adulthood's delta looms, and one day we look to get our bearings and find that we are out to sea.

And now we know what we did not know then: what an adventure it was!

And what a repository, what a garage sale, what a mother lode for the fiction writer stalking a story, looking for adventure, looking for suspense, conflict,

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looking for characters that aren't boring, looking for characters that are. . . ."characters."

There are at least two keys to childhood's repository. One is a much-neglected, underused, ancient contraption, dulled from idleness, taken for granted. It's called memory, and it is as much a miracle as a moon shot or a laser beam. One Sunday afternoon several years ago, young Sean closed the door to his room, drew the shades, sat on the bed and began staring fiercely at his little study-desk chair. He had heard it was possible to will an object to move, and it was his intention to concentrate that chair across his bedroom floor to the window, or at least to the closet. Fifteen minutes later he was still at it, genuinely surprised that the thing wasn't budging.

I couldn't find the words to explain to an eight-year-old that every time he recollected his name, he was doing something every bit as magical as a chair-moving stunt. I, for example, without moving a muscle, an eyelash, without so much as a twitch, both hands in full view at all times, no curtains, no boxes – and I can bring back, bring back right now, Joey Lapella, whom I haven't seen for more than 30 years – and here he is, materialized – no strings, no sleeves – his teeth still as green as they were in 1953 because he doesn't brush, his long floppy blond hair, his sharp little fox's face – Joey Lapella – in front of my very eyes! And if I am a good enough writer, I can make him materialize in front of your eyes too.

Isn't it magical, wonderful thing that our childhoods are not irretrievably lost to us, like the juice squeezed forever from an orange, and that without moving so much as an eyelash we can call back Buddy Brathwaite's bare, rat-proof feet, or Ginny Sukoloski's dungaree-nipping pet duck, or Joey Lapella's green teeth? Our school graduations from year to year are never really total. Something of each of us is "left back" in every grade we pass. We carry attic treasures in our heads.

A second key to the repository of childhood is one that's as common as memory. It begins when we wake up in the morning, and there's really not much more to it than that. It's called paying attention.

Does the writer wish to know people? Different kinds of people? Simple. Start with a single kid. Pick one out. Any one. Get to know him. All his colors and shadings, all his moments. Because each kid is a population unto himself, a walking cross-section, a demographic grab bag, and a child's bedroom is as much a window to the universe as a scientist's lab or a philosopher's study.

I remember when I started to pay attention. On May 24, 1977, I went to sleep by myself in a third-floor efficiency in Norristown, Pennsylvania. On May 25, I went to sleep in a house in Havertown with a wife, six children and a hermit crab. Give me about a month to get over the shock, and figure by early July I was beginning to pay attention.

And what did I find? I found six Huckleberry Finns, rafting, poling along, one near the headwaters, one near the gulf and the rest in-between, making their landfalls along the Mississippis of their kidhoods.

Today there are two still out on the river, 9-year-old Ben and 11-year-old Sean. One Friday night not long ago, they made a landfall. An all-night sleepover at the nearby YMCA. Grades one to six welcome. Bring your own bedroll. Games. Movies. Splash party. Refreshments. And a sock hop.

I looked at my wife. "A *sock* hop?"

"So they don't scuff up the gym floor," she explained.

"I'm not talking about feet," I said. "How about age? Grade school kids? A *dance*?"

I don't recall my wife's answer to that. What I do remember is young Sean's reaction. It was altogether matter-of-fact, composed, and gave no hint that he had heard, much less given any weight to my irrelevant fussing. With a simple, brief announcement, he measured himself precisely and perfectly against the experience at hand. He said: "Well, I don't know much about dancing, but I can spin on my back for five seconds."

And that's about it, isn't it? Like an old Brenda Lee 45, we spin on our backs for five seconds – looking back, that's all it seems, doesn't it – and then – poof! – we're grown up. But it was a glorious five seconds while it lasted – glorious and funny and excruciating and fascinating and significant. Worth remembering. Worth paying attention to. Worth writing about. Worth reading about.

JERRY SPINELLI BIOGRAPHY AND BOOKS

Judith Bugniazet
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Jerry Spinelli was born in 1941 in Norristown, Pennsylvania. He is married to Eileen Mesi (another writer) and they have seven children.

It would be reasonable to assume that his seven children have influenced his writing for and about teenagers. To have lived through seven teenagers and be able to write about them with humor is admirable. This is probably why his writing is so realistic. All the fighting that siblings typically do and the things they fight about are humorously detailed in Spinelli's writing.

Spinelli has been a magazine publisher for Chilton Company since 1966 and was an active member of the U.S. Naval Reserve from 1966-1972.

His writings include *Space Station Seventh Grade* (1982), *Who Put That Hair In My Toothbrush* (1985) and *Night of the Whale* (1985). His work has appeared in several anthologies, including *Best Sports Stories*, published in 1982.

Spinelli writes about becoming a writer: "After my high school football team won a big game, I went home to write a poem about it while the town celebrated and blared in the streets. The poem was published in the local newspaper, and I've been a writer ever since."

NIGHT OF THE WHALE

Little Brown, 1985 ISBN: 0-316-80718-4

School is finally out; it is senior weekend. Mouse and his friends are going to spend a week in a beach house on their own. Digger drinks beer all week; Lauren works on her face and tan; Breeze looks for girls and stays out all night; Wags experiences life to the fullest, despite being confined to a wheelchair. Mouse has a list of things he wants to do, preferably during this week, including pulling an all-nighter, chugging a can of beer and drinking a gallon of anything. What they don't count on during their week of fun is the beaching of 29 whales, or their finding them when their car breaks down. They immediately assume the responsibility of helping the Marine Mammal Stranding Team save the whales. They work so hard that they can hardly move when they're done. Trying to save a beached whale is almost impossible, but unless you try, you know they will die.

SPACE STATION SEVENTH GRADE

Little Brown, 1982 ISBN: 0-316-80709-5
Dell, 1984

For some reason Jason thought they'd be treated like men in seventh grade, but the bathroom still reads "Boys." They are still treated like boys too, especially by the older boys.

Jason has many experiences during his year in seventh grade. He notices cheerleaders, tries out for football, plays baseball and experiences his first pimple. He fights with his parents because of his little brother and realizes how important little brothers really are. He discovers the difference between superficial girls, special girls and friendship. In short it's a year of growing up for Jason. Told in the first person, this is a funny and very real look at a special young man.

WHO PUT THAT HAIR IN MY TOOTHBRUSH?

Little Brown, 1984 ISBN: 0-316-80712-5
Dell, 1986

This book is about Megin and Greg, a brother and sister who are constantly fighting. Megin calls Greg Grosso, and doesn't understand his neatness or his obsession with his tan and working out. Greg calls Megin Megamouth, and is constantly complaining about her room being a potential haven for roaches. Greg is actually trying to make himself perfect for Jennifer Wade, a fact that Megin is aware of and rubs-in constantly. Greg is unaware of the better side of Megin. Her new found friend Emilie is an old woman Megin has been visiting. This look at a brother/sister relationship provides two points of view that are both funny and heartwarming. One chapter is told in the first person by Megin and the next by Greg. They eventually realize how important they are to each other and that, despite the constant bickering, they really do love one another.

I WANT TO MAKE THEM LAUGH

Ellen Conford
Great Neck, New York

I was speaking to a meeting of Young Adult librarians. I finished my prepared speech and began to field questions from the audience.

One woman asked me, "Are there any subjects that even you can't treat humorously?"

"Yes," I replied. "Cancer and abortion. Other than those two, I can make jokes about almost anything."

An intense looking middle aged man leaped to his feet. "What about nuclear holocaust?" he demanded.

I was a little startled, but after a moment's thought I replied, "I don't think World War III would be a laugh riot, but I might be able to come up with an ironic comment or two."

"No," he said impatiently. "What I meant was, what are you *doing* about it?"

"Hoping it doesn't happen," I said. I was confused. I thought I was supposed to discuss funny books with a group of librarians.

Was this, in fact, not a library association meeting at all? Had I somehow wandered into a political rally? Would I be asked to sign a petition on nuclear war? (I'm against it.)

"Don't you think," he went on, "that it's your responsibility as a writer for young people to alert them about the dangers of the arms race?"

"No!" I said, horrified.

"But if their own authors don't tell them, who will?"

"Dan Rather," I said. "Peter Jennings. Tom Brokaw. Any kid with ears already knows about the possibility of being incinerated in three seconds. And they know they have no power to do anything to save themselves. You want me to scare them some more?"

"Not me!"

There are a number of talented YA authors who can make kids cry, shudder and vicariously live the traumas their protagonists experience. Maybe one of those authors is capable of writing the ultimate YA novel on nuclear war.

But not me.

Whatever talent I have is particularly geared toward making children laugh, not cry. Growing up is hard enough in any era to require some amusement, some distraction, some distance from the all too immediate concerns of everyday life. Acceptance, self-esteem, the opposite sex, parental expectations, friendship, teachers, classes and glands are critically important to adolescents.

A few years ago I received a letter from a reader in Maine. She wrote, "Whenever something terrible happens to me, like, for instance, getting into a car accident on my first date, I try to think, "Now, how would Ellen Conford turn this into a funny chapter?"

I'd like to think that by dealing with their universal problems in a humorous way I provide some comic relief, some perspective for kids going through an often bewildering period in their lives.

In the summer of 1983 I taught Juvenile fiction writing at a writers' conference. Half the members of my workshop were teachers. They felt they could write for kids because they knew kids. They understood them. After all, didn't they work with them every day?

Almost all my teachers felt they had something important to teach young people through the books they hoped to write.

Whenever one of my teacher-writers told me this, I said, "**Please**, teach them in the classroom. If you want to write for them, you'd better put down your chalk and pick up your cap and bells."

The workshop was ten days long. Every day I tried to persuade my teachers to forget they were teachers and to try and be entertainers. But I had limited success convincing them that children will not tolerate being preached to.

On the seventh day of the conference I met Dominick, who was enrolled in another workshop. Dominick had 19 nieces and nephews, and was ex-

pecting numbers 20 and 21 over the weekend. Dominick said he was very excited to meet me, since he and his eleven-year-old niece read all my books together. I said I was very excited to meet him, since he and his family practically constituted a whole new market for my work.

"My niece," he told me, "says you're her favorite author because you always follow her three rules for good writing."

"Naturally, I was intrigued. "What are your niece's three rules for good writing?"

Dominick said: "Don't bore me. Don't make it stupid. And don't treat me like a child."

I just stood there for a moment with my mouth hanging open.

"Why couldn't I have met you the first day of this conference?" I said. "It's taken me seven days to try and say what your niece said in 13 words."

I could have just written Dominick's niece's Three Rules for Good Writing on the blackboard the first day of the workshop, taken my money and gone home.

One of my favorite quotable people – beside's Dominick's niece – is Sam Goldwyn, the "G" of MGM movies. Goldwyn had a gift for saying things that were so screwy they actually made sense.

One of the things he said was, "If people don't want to go to a movie, you can't stop them."

He also told a young producer who wanted to make a very serious, socially significant movie, "You want to send a message? Call Western Union."

People who want to write for kids may feel they have something important to say to them, a lesson they ought to learn. But if kids won't read a book, you can't stop them. They'll never get the message if it isn't conveyed in an entertaining way.

Television – always accessible, always easy, a totally passive experience – television is my competition. the more kids watch television, the less likely they are to read me.

When kids have spare time they have a basic entertainment option. They can choose to be entertained by reading or by watching TV. Reading is work. Kids have to learn it. They associate it with school. Watching is so much easier. You just lie there until your mind becomes slushy and you can't feel your fingers and toes anymore. You don't even have to move your eyes. And no one ever had to be taught how to watch television.

This is why I think that the author who sets out to teach kids through her books may be in big trouble from the start. Kids go to school for six hours a day, where someone tries to teach them something. Then they come home and do homework covering the subjects someone tried to teach them. When they have time for pleasure, they want entertainment, and they want it fast and easy. Why not? Don't adults who work at brain-taxing jobs need time to relax and enjoy themselves? Everyone's mind needs time to relax. Kids are no exception. are no exception.

Humorous books are ideal for kids with math-weary heads and TV-shortened attention spans. So much of what is funny depends on brevity, the soul of wit. Even the works associated with humor tend to be short and to the point: gag, joke, quip, punch line. Puns are one-word jokes. Standup comedians specialize in "one liners."

A punch line is sometimes called the payoff. It's the reward one gets for listening to the buildup of a joke. There are quick payoffs for kids when they read a funny book. In a funny book the reader knows that he or she is going to get that payoff, the laugh, on almost every page. In a humorous story the reader isn't merely entertained; he or she is motivated to keep on reading. The promise of all those payoffs can sustain interest just as much as a thrill-packed plot.

What I want to do in my writing is to tell a satisfying story that will provide fun and amusement for a young reader. I don't want to teach anybody anything. I don't have an earth-shaking message to get across. I just want to seduce kids away from the television set and into the world of books. I want kids to *love* books – not just my books, but the whole world of reading – as much as I did when I was their age.

The payoff for me as a writer is a letter from a girl who was in an auto accident on her first date.

Or the letter I received last week from a twelve-year-old Texan: "Your books are so funny and so real that when I start reading one I get so involved in the heroine's problems I forget about my own."

The marvelous thing is, that when I start *writing*

one, so do I. In fact, when a book is going well, I have such a good time I can even forget about nuclear war.

ELLEN CONFORD BIOGRAPHY AND BOOKS

Judith Bugniazet
East Carolina University
Greenville, North Carolina

Ellen Conford was born in New York City in 1942. She is married and has one son. She has written many books for children and young adults. She wrote her first book when her son was four-years-old and she couldn't find a book in the library for him. She decided that she could write something better than what was available, and out of that *Impossible Possum* was born.

Ellen Conford is best known for her humor. She writes to entertain. As a child she loved reading, and she'd like to give other children some of the same pleasure. She writes to give a good alternative to television viewing.

The ideas and characters for many of her books are derived from people she has known. Most of her protagonists are girls between the ages of 11 and 16 who are average in every way, except one. They are witty and adept at sarcasm and one-liners. They sound almost like stand-up comics and, in fact, the protagonist in *Strictly for Laughs* is one.

Conford understands the awkwardness of adolescence, and is able to write about it. Her heroines are used to embarrassment and awkward moments. She seems to be telling adolescents to look at life with a little humor. Although she doesn't deal with serious, painful situations she tries to allow adolescents to laugh at the small problems that they encounter every day.

Ellen Conford has won many awards for her writing. *The Alfred G. Graebner Memorial High School Handbook of Rules and Regulations* was chosen a Notable Young Adult Book of 1976 by the American Library Association. She also won the Pacific Northwest Young Reader's Choice Award

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BAMBINGER. *1986 Red Ribbon*

in 1981, the California Young Reader's Medal in 1982 and *Smart Aleck* was named one of the *School Library Journal's* Best Books of the year for 1983.

THE ALFRED G. GRAEBNER MEMORIAL HIGH SCHOOL HANDBOOK OF RULES & REGULATIONS

Little Brown, 1976 ISBN: 0-316-15293-5

Julie's first disaster in high school is her schedule. First period gym! Another disaster comes when she tries to submit a poem to the "literary" magazine "Taproots." The "Taproots" editors are more interested in poetry that shocks than quality writing, and when Julie realizes this she no longer wants to be involved with the magazine. Some of the other things Conford makes fun of in this book are sex education, gym, skipping school, the school store and student government. This book is both humorous and realistic; it describes high school as it really is.

DEAR LOVEY HART, I AM DESPARATE

Little Brown, 1975 ISBN: 0-316-15306-0
Scholastic, 1977

How can a high school girl be expected to give advise on other people's lives when she's unsure about her own? "Lovey Hart," a lovelorn column in the school newspaper, is very popular, at first, then becomes the brunt of jokes and ridicule. Some problems are really serious, like teens without parents, possible suicide and drugs. How can Lovey Hart answer these questions without any life experiences of her own? How can she keep the rest of the school from finding out just who is Lovey Hart?

IF THIS IS LOVE I'LL TAKE SPAGHETTI

Scholastic, 1984 ISBN: 0-590-32338-5

This is a group of nine short stories about teenage life. The title of the book is taken from the title of the first story. In the first story, Jamie is trying to diet. She's always hungry which makes her depressed and want to eat more. At first she decides that if love takes all this effort, she'd rather eat. Until she starts dating Jeff. All the stories are good reading, funny and heartwarming.

STRICTLY FOR LAUGHS

Putnam, 1985 ISBN: 0-448-47754-8

Joey Merino wants to be a comedienne more than anything else. In fact, her whole existence is to be funny and make people laugh. When Peter, her longtime best friend, gets to fill-in as a disc jockey on his uncle's radio station, Joey sees her big chance. Of course her chance is complicated by Joey's feelings for Peter. For three years she's been in love with him, but he's unaware of it. She can't understand why he lets beautiful Dinah Smythe sing on the program and do the show with them. Since Joey usually handles everything by joking, its hard for her to let Peter know how she really feels. Instead, he's wondering what has happened to change her personality from funny to sarcastic, and why it's so obvious that she and Dinah hate each other. Joey has to learn that there are some things you don't joke about.

TO ALL FANS, WITH LOVE FROM SYLVIE

Little Brown, 1982 ISBN: 0-316-15312-5
Archway

Sylvie wants to be a movie star. She's had a difficult life. Her mother is institutionalized, she doesn't even know where, and she has no father. She's been in foster homes since she was three. She's now 15 and beautiful, creating another problem. Her last two foster fathers have made advances on Sylvie and she's running out of excuses to get away from them, so she decides to run away to Hollywood. On the bus she's robbed by a little old lady and finds herself at a restaurant in the middle of the country without any money. This is where she meets Walter. Walter offers to take her to Hollywood. Of course the ride has its price, and it's a price Sylvie is not ready to pay. She gets away from Walter in Las Vegas where she meets Vic, who also wants to help her, but for another reason.

THE TERRIBLE HILARITY OF ADOLESCENCE IN *DINKY HOCKER SHOOTS SMACK!*

M. Kip Hartvigsen Christen Borg Hartvigsen
Ricks College - Rexburg, Idaho

Adolescence, someone once said, is like a house on moving day – everything is in a temporary mess. This analogy, however, may be something of an understatement: while few of us may dispute the rough going of the teen years, young people may think of their problems as anything but *temporary*. Lacking some of the perspective that comes with time and experience, teenagers may see their own toil and trouble as a never-ending series of crises.

One of the much talked about boons of young adult literature is that it affords young people perspective on their lives at a time when objectivity is so hard to achieve. Certainly another boon of some young adult literature is that it proffers this perspective with humor, helping the young to see what one critic has called the "terrible hilarity of adolescence" (Carlson, p. 8) without losing heart.

Few other writers of young adult literature have so skillfully shown humor embedded in oftentimes serious adolescent quandaries as M. E. Kerr. Regarded as one of the stars in her field (Nilsen and Donelson, p. 28), she, in a string of novels, has written dialog with verve, created believable characters, observed life accurately, and most notably used humor to make serious points. While her works have been consistently acclaimed, *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!*, her first novel for young readers, is regarded as one of her best, exemplifying the kind of humor that inspires adolescents to take heart because they see in her writing that they too can survive.

Kerr portrays in this novel a few months in the lives of Tucker Woolf and Dinky Hocker. Tucker, whose point of view informs the novel, is totally befuddled. He's in love – sort of – for the first time and coping with a mother anxious about his involvement with a girl and his girlfriend's guardians, who are not at all sure they approve of Tucker or his seemingly suspect intentions. But most frustrating for Tucker are his self-assessed lack of "pizazz," his inexperience at love, and his teenage social ineptitude. In summing up Tucker's character critic David Rees calls Tucker Woolf "the most appealing character in all M. E. Kerr's novels, a totally credible, ordinary fifteen-year-old boy" (p. 23).

Dinky Hocker, so nicknamed by her parents, but actually neither dinky at 165 pounds nor a shooter of smack (heroin), is struggling to become the *Susan* she is inside. Besides combatting a weight problem her parents lead her to believe is glandular, she must also contend with a do-gooder mother who gives more attention to her drug rehabilitees and ghetto-children charity cases than to her own daughter. "The shrinks should pay more attention to stupid mothers," she says in self defense, "and leave normal people with gland problems alone."

In addition to these two are Natalia Line and P. John Knight, Tucker's and Dinky's romantic interests. Natalia is Dinky's live-in cousin, and P. John is Tucker's 220-pound match for Dinky and Tucker's only hope to date Natalia, who refuses to go out if Dinky sits home.

If we look at adolescence as an experience infused with humor, there are several comedies running through the lives of typical teenagers like Tucker, Dinky, Natalia and P. John: (1) the comedy of adolescent manners – life with the peer group, caught up in the intricacies of prescribed dress, speech, conduct and even humor; (2) the comedy of initiation – the bittersweet experience of the first everything: the first date, the first love, the first shaft, the first realization that parents are not perfect and do not have all the answers; and (3) the comedy of getting along with authority figures – the challenge of living

with, understanding, and pleasing adults, most notably parents. In *Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack!*, M. E. Kerr illuminates each of these broad types of humor, all a part of the terrible hilarity of adolescence, to give insights into the struggles of the young to grow and build self esteem.

The Comedy of Adolescent Manners

Perhaps at no other time in a person's life is one so called upon to conform than during adolescence when life focuses on peers who somehow manage to dictate codes of style, the violation of which may lead to the end of one's life – social, that is. To most adults very few of these prescriptions and attitudes make sense, whether they be a hankering for unconventional dress (Dinky "favored ersatz articles of clothing, like her father's tweed-suit vest worn over a T-shirt, with green cotton pajama bottoms and old white tennis socks"); hyperbolic language (Dinky with a date? That was like saying "it snowed for three straight months in Biloxi, Mississippi"); sarcasm and the perfect put-down ("What you know about psychos would fill an ant's mouth"); or an insatiable appreciation for the gross (Over lunch, Dinky tells Tucker about elephant man John Merrick, the subject of her book report: "He was grotesque. . . He only had one eye, and his whole head was covered with these big cauliflower sacs which gave off a really putrid odor, and he didn't have hands.").

While all of these comic elements of adolescent manners combine to capture the tone of teenage life, Dinky's fixation on the gross is particularly humorous, representing the teenage proclivity to explore the bizarre. Besides her interest in John Merrick, Dinky savors relating information about a pinhead woman "whose ears were attached to her shoulders," hydrocephalics with oversized heads "so big they can hardly carry them on their shoulders," and junkies who have contracted bulbous acne from shooting heroin. Dinky's amazing tales inspire Tucker to out-gross the competition; one of his stories is about a small-town nurse who confesses to having switched the name tags of newborn babies for twenty years. "No one in town had the right baby. No one knew who their real brothers and sisters were, or who their real mothers and fathers were." Dinky upon hearing this yarn "whistled and hit her forehead with her palm."

Besides using this unsophisticated humor to capture the teenage appreciation for the weird, Kerr also uses these bizarre anecdotes to develop Dinky's character. During the short time she and P. John are allowed to express their friendship unfettered by parental interference, Dinky comes to think more of herself. P. John accepts her for what she is. Encouraged by P. John, the two friends join Weight Watchers and immediately lose pounds, proving to Dinky that her problem is not glandular. As Dinky begins to feel less freakish, she also loses interest in the freakish. After the beginning of this metamorphosis, Tucker tries to share with Dinky her "kind of story," a four-year-old girl who developed breasts and pubic hair after eating several jars of her mother's hormone cream for wrinkles, but Dinky responds: "I'm not interested in the bizarre anymore." Sadly, however, her new found interests are short lived. When Mrs. Hocker ends Dinky's relationship with P. John, the old problems and interests return, and Dinky begins thinking of herself as an abnormality: "Don't call me Susan anymore. It's laughable."

The scarcasm and put-downs in the novel are likewise typical adolescent humor. Dinky is the queen of sarcasm, and nearly every character in the novel is her target at one time or another; for instance, she nicknames her cousin Natalia Rhyme (because Natalia rhymes words when she is nervous) and complains to Tucker, "We have a walking, taking, rhyming dictionary living with us. . . and I can tell you I'm thrilled about *that*." Dinky's most caustic jabs are aimed at her mother's causes. Mrs. Hocker once likens Nader, the stray cat adopted by Tucker and later Dinky, to her drug addicts, "only they aren't cute and cuddly like Nader, and no one wants to take them in." Dinky retorts, "Nader wouldn't punch you in the face and grab your purse, either."

Dinky, like many adolescents, covers up her insecurity by striking out at others, but she also directs her sarcasm at herself. When Tucker asks her to come over to his house, Dinky (who elsewhere calls herself "Dinky Dull") says, "All the derricks are in use tonight. I have no transportation."

And she later answers Natalia's sincere question "Why can't we reach you?" with "It's certainly not because there isn't enough of me to reach." Young adult novelist Richard Peck has observed that whereas laughter in maturity is a cure, "in youth, laughter is a weapon" (p. 189). Because Dinky's self esteem is so low, she often shoots from the hip, hoping to hit others' imperfections and make *them* feel uncomfortable the way she does. Or she turns the weapon of humor on herself, feeling that if she pokes fun at her own self, she will beat others to the draw.

Dinky's self derision does not entirely preclude others' jokes about her weight. Often among the young, anyone who breaks the accepted mold of looks or behavior becomes the butt of jokes, so no one wants to be too brainy, too tall, too short, too obedient, too respectful – *too* anything. The "fat jokes" in *Dinky Hocker* illustrate what happens to a teenager who doesn't blend into the group. Tucker silently assesses Dinky's outfit for her first date with P. John as a "huge feed bag someone had cut armholes in," and at another time he thinks, "To ask someone like Dinky to go into Woerner's Restaurant just to pick up pies for her mother was to ask a wino to drop in at a vineyard just to watch the bottling process." Even Tucker's father can't resist asking, after Natalia receives a picture postcard of the Hocker family in a Venetian gondola, "Was it afloat, or slowly sinking into the canal?"

Also part of the teenage comedy of manners is dating, with its subsequent pitfalls and assaults on self esteem. Again Kerr has captured the essence of the terrible comedy. When Tucker and P. John arrive at the Hockers' to pick up Natalia and Dinky for their first date, they are met at the door by Mr. and Mrs. Hocker, appearing like "the First Family on the White House steps greeting guests for a state dinner." P. John and Tucker soon learn that cutting the right figure before *the* guardian adults is a task not to be dealt with lightly. The Hockers, confirmed liberals, swallow hard when P. John inadvertently disparages their values: "I'm one of your few New Yorkers not on the dole" and "One of my heroes is from the 50's,. . .Senator Joseph R. McCarthy, the great crusader against Communism." Mr. Hocker barks, "He wasn't one of *our* heroes. He was a misinformed, insensitive, trouble-making headline grabber." When an awkward silence follows, the best Tucker can come up with is: "That's what makes a horse race, I guess."

The Comedy of Initiation

Eventually Dinky and Natalia make their appearance, and the double dates are off to a "majestic" beginning, striding out of the house "like royalty"; however, the couples stumble all over each other passing through the door since there was no way for P. John and Dinky to fit at the same time. This is only the beginning of disaster, as the comedy of manners soon becomes a comedy of initiation. Minutes into the evening, Tucker is fighting off impending panic. Anticipating the long evening ahead and hoping for an immediate attack of appendicitis. Tucker laments that "he was obviously not ready for this first date." When dancing with Natalia, he worries about breathing into her ear and sounding like a sex maniac. Meanwhile, to Tucker's amazement, P. John and Susan – P. John insists upon calling Dinky by her real name – glide through an enchanted evening as if they are the "Most Popular couple in the senior class." Never at a loss for words, Dinky and P. John are oblivious to anyone but themselves. "So much for fixing up a pair of fatties out of the kindness of your heart," Tucker thinks to himself, deflated and, no doubt, envious.

After a round of hamburgers with P. John and Dinky to cap off the evening and more "brilliant repartee," as he calls his lackluster conversation, Tucker chalks the evening up as a "nervewrecking fiasco." Later during the night, trying to sleep "in the face of flashes of everything he had done wrong on his date. . . .he had finally decided to just never see her again." Tucker certainly sees little that is humorous in the evening's disaster, but readers do, sensing that Tucker *will* live through his first date and find more to say to Natalia during less official social encounters. But for now, Kerr has provided her younger readers a catharsis, having helped them to laugh while facing up to the painful initiations of adolescent life.

The Comedy of Getting Along with Authority Figures

As the young people in the novel experience some

of the rites of passage through the teenage years, they must also sort out feelings for and relationships with the authority figures in their world, most often parents. Allowing her young characters extensive interaction with adults, Kerr has accomplished a feat that has not gone unnoticed. According to Rees, Kerr is "one of the few authors whose books for the young show adults as major, influential characters,. . . .tensions in her stories frequently com{ing} from parent-child relationships" (p. 31). As with the other complications Kerr's young characters encounter in *Dinky Hocker*, their attempts to get along with parents, their own as well as their friends', are also infused with humor, at times good-natured and ironic, at times sardonic.

The humor found in Tucker's relationship with his parents is most often light-hearted. Periodically Tucker endures some razzing from his parents. Topics for chiding include Tucker's customary solemn nature: "Oh, don't tell me you're going to choke up some youthful laughter, Tucker!"; his cooking: "prepare everything, providing {your} Mushroom Dream {is} not on the menu"; and his being in love: "No, you're not in love. . . .Love makes you sweeter, and you sound pretty sour to me this morning." Most often Tucker's parents endeavor to understand him, and the kidding on both sides usually serves to ease tension, not to create it.

P. John's and Dinky's relationships with their parents are characterized by a different tone. Both P. John and Dinky see their parents bungling familial responsibilities. Humor stems from ensuing rebellion, as children attempt to rectify the injustice they perceive, in this case, neglect. P. John captures the feelings of the conflict when he responds to Dinky's question about his initial *P*: "It's my father's name, so I don't use it." P. John also rejects his father's liberal views because he thinks his father cares more for migrant workers and politcial activists than his son. He bemoans, "My mother was a Republican . . . .I don't know what she saw in *him*." He tells Tucker's family: "I have a few solid opinions: Law and order. Better dead than red. If you outlaw guns, only outlaws will own guns. . . .Cliches for the sake of summary." He wants his father's attention, even though he also seems to be self-conscious about having an eccentric father whose motto, in P. John words, is "Give us your tired, your poor, your huddled masses, and we'll feed them and put them on the dole." P. John's position is comical because it is extreme, his hyperbolic talk more a statement against his father than a fierce conviction on his part.

P. John may have reasons for feeling that his father is too concerned about others, but Dinky is the one who truly is neglected. Mr. Knight is a foil to Mrs. Hocker in that he seems to be sincere and unselfish in his attempts to help the poor, modest life style reflecting his views that those who have should share with those who don't. Mrs. Hocker, on the other hand, embraces social causes to be a "credit to the community." Because she seeks the limelight in her service, she ignores the more private work of helping her own daughter develop self esteem, exacerbating Dinky's problems as she spends her prime time on her "smackheads." Readers, therefore, see her as a phony, a wolf in "Good Shepherd's" clothing. Consequently, the humor surrounding Mrs. Hocker occurs because readers laugh at her, teenagers especially taking pleasure in seeing Mrs. Hocker lose her patience, be embarrassed or look ridiculous. When her facade is exposed, it is cause for scornful glee.

An interchange between Mrs. Hocker and P. John at her rebirth therapy session is one such incident. P. John, not surprisingly, is unimpressed with Mrs. Hocker's "junkies," and tests her patience by commenting, when she accuses him of not knowing anything about her reformees' outlook on life, "I know enough about their outlook to keep my money in my sock." He brings issues closer to home a few moments later:

> "P. John," Mrs. Hocker said, "you're a very brash young man. You do test people's patience."
>
> "I just say what I think, Ma'am."
>
> "I hope Dinky doesn't pick up that habit," Mrs. Hocker said. "It's not a very attractive habit for a young person."
>
> "Dinky's not a very attractive name for a young person," said P. John.
>
> Mrs. Hocker didn't answer. She was getting ice trays from the refrigerator.

> When her hands were full, she suddenly whirled around and kicked the door shut like a punter going for pigskin, with such force the glasses on the kitchen shelves shook.

Another source of humor regarding Mrs. Hocker is her exchanges with Dinky. Whereas Tucker experiences with his parents only a mild case of generation-gap intolerance (for instance, his lack of excitement about his parents' love for "hit songs from the dark ages"), Dinky harbors a much more heated resentment ("My mother isn't interested in what *you* mean. She's interested in what *she* means.") As noted, Dinky loves sarcasm, and uses it to full advantage lashing out at her mother. The dueling of wits between mother and daughter, characterized by sardonic quips, ultimately builds the tension in their relationship rather than relieving it.

The caustic remarks between Dinky and Mrs. Hocker are most biting at the Hockers' Christmas party, a chapter that Mary Kingsbury claims "would be memorable at any stage in a writer's development" (p. 294). P. John is noticeably omitted from the guest list, since the Hockers have terminated Dinky's contact with him. Consequently, the party spirit is dampened at best, as Dinky and her mother fling cutting remarks that become increasingly vicious. Mrs. Hocker especially embarrasses Dinky by belittling her new diet and P. John's gift, a Weight Watcher's cookbook given with the sincerest of intentions: "Oh my my my my my. Isn't that romantic?" After all, Mrs. Hocker claims, P. John was obviously only "interested in her weight problem."

In the end, Dinky is forced to extreme measures to make her mother understand what *Susan* feels. When Mrs. Hocker is chosen the Brooklyn Heights Good Samaritan of the year, she gushes at a banquet in her honor, "What pleases me most is that you're pleased with me." Outside, Dinky is furiously painting "on sidewalks, on curbstones, on walls, on the sides of buildings, and on the doors of automobiles" in every size and every color "DINKY HOCKER SHOOTS SMACK!" Readers' gasps turn to guffaws as they realize the crowning blow Dinky has struck with Day-Glo paint. Even usually solemn Tucker must "bit[e] away an irrepressible smile" as he thinks of the look on Mrs. Hocker's face when she steps from the banquet hall to the street. But Dinky's most outlandish act also makes the most serious point of the novel. Tucker explains in words to Mr. Hocker what Dinky shouts at her mother with her claim to drug dependence: "I think [this is all] about things amounting to a lot more than people think they amount to – I think it's about having your feelings shoved aside....People who don't shoot smack have problems too."

Finally, Dinky's jabs toward her mother, herself and other characters do not merely entertain; they also enlighten the teenagers' struggles to develop personalities and establish relationships on their own. All four young people in *Dinky Hocker* have problems with being accepted by themselves, their friends, their parents. Kerr tackles those problems with humor of many kinds. All of *Dinky Hocker's* young people show growing up to be complicated. In their various crises of adolescence, Kerr explores the humor wrapped around and through their trials. Readers have a good laugh because the crises in the novel are at a safe distance and yet are so close to home that they share the adversity and take heart as Kerr demonstrates that teenagers can survive the never-ending "mess" that seems to surround them.

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YA BOOKS IN THE CLASSROOM

Choosing Issues for Reading and Writing: Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development

Audrey T. Edwards
Frostburg State College
Frostburg, Maryland

Every year I face a classic problem. As a teacher I want my students to think, to apply all their experiences and ideas, to read actively and write inventively. My students, on the other hand, want to believe what they read and simply tell me about it.

In searching for a way to tempt these passive people to think, I came across Lawrence Kohlberg's work on moral education. Kohlberg says that if a person is presented with two opposing views, the person experiences cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable intellectual conflict. He or she tries to reduce this conflict by comparing and reconciling the two positions.

Applying the notion of cognitive dissonance, I set my students to reading stories or essays that present a moral dilemma (sometimes from two different viewpoints), discussing opposing views and writing to compare and reconcile the differences. I find that the success of this approach rests on my attitude toward student opinion as well as on the readings used.

Moral Development

According to Kohlberg, the ability to think and act in a moral way develops according to a universal, orderly pattern. Although he sees this process as a natural evolution, he stresses the facilitating effect of an optimal environment, including discussion of moral dilemmas. Kohlberg explicates five principles for enhancing discussion:

(1) focus not so much on a solution as on the reasoning behind it,
(2) respect the participant's right to his or her beliefs (though not necessarily the beliefs themselves),
(3) reflect and clarify statements,
(4) support statements that reflect development to the next stage, and
(5) do not impose change (on hearing new ideas, the participant decides what to accept or reject).

Initially, I had difficulty in getting my students to express their opinions freely, so I divided the class into groups of five or six for initial discussion, then asked the groups to compare notes in a whole-class discussion where I could act as facilitator using Kohlberg's principles.

Choosing Readings

The other problem (a much more critical one) was to find literature about issues my students would see as real moral dilemmas. Inexperienced readers, they were over-awed by the authority of professional writers and tended to believe whatever opinion they were given. I found I had to either present two opposing essays or use stories in which a dilemma was presented as such. Although I enjoy using both, I find that choosing stories presents some special considerations.

In selecting readings, I found some help in the work of Kohlberg and his associates. Their studies suggest five criteria; as an English teacher, I added another. Here are the six:

(1) the presence of a genuine moral dilemma,
(2) familiarity of the moral problem,
(3) appropriate level of the dilemma,
(4) for stories, appropriate level of development of the characters,

(5) a match between moral level and literary level, and
(6) high literary quality.

A Genuine Moral Dilemma

Kohlberg and Elliot Turiel recommend that students encounter genuine dilemmas that cannot be resolved by merely reciting slogans or "virtue-words": "The pat little stories in school readers in which virtue always triumphs or in which everyone is really nice are unlikely to have any value in the stimulation of moral development" (Kohlberg & Turiel, 1971). A true dilemma presents choices that appear real and difficult to the student. For example, a choice between telling the truth and lying to protect a friend.

Familiarity of the Moral Problem

The moral dilemma should relate to the student's own experience: for most high school students, the problem of dealing with a parent would be a better choice than one of deciding about mercy killing. A story can, however, have a setting as fanciful as science fiction or as exotic, to most of us, as the world of bullfighting. What is crucial is that the student reader can identify with the hero in emotions and reasoning.

Appropriate Level of Dilemma

Kohlberg indicates that people develop morally by coming into contact with reasoning one stage above that of their own thinking. From the conflict of stages comes advancement.

If the dilemma is too simple, there is no conflict, only ready agreement on a solution. On the other hand, if the alternatives and the arguments are too advanced, the student does not understand the conflict.

Kohlberg and Turiel give some indication of the stages of moral development most commonly found at each age level. From the ages of 13 to 21, American boys most commonly use Stage III and, therefore, can profit by exposure to Stage IV.

At State III, conforming to the will of the group, emphasis is on gaining approval or avoiding disapproval by pleasing or helping others. One earns approval by being nice or conforming to acceptable behavior, sometimes referred to as the good boy/girl orientation.

At Stage IV, law and order orientation, right behavior consists of respecting authority, following the rules, obeying the law and maintaining the given social order.

For example, a dilemma at the right level for my students (one stage above their own thinking) might deal with reporting a law-breaking friend, since a person at Stage III recognizes that standards exist apart from self-interest. (The decision is not seen as a problem at Stage II, where the friend's anger and reprisals are the only consideration.)

Appropriate Level: Story Characters

If students are to advance by reading stories, the thinking shown by the central characters should, ideally, be one stage above that of the students. For example, students at Stage III (good people do this) benefit by reading about people at Stage IV (law and order).

(As with the dilemma, if a character's reasoning is at or below the students' stage of development, they will understand but will not progress beyond their present stage as a result of the experience. If her reasoning is two or more stages above that of the students, they simply will not understand it.)

In attempting to classify stories according to level of moral development of the central characters, I found no shortcuts. Since I was looking for Stage IV thinking, I searched a story for statements or actions by the main character indicating this stage of moral development. To avoid stereotyping on the basis of too little evidence, I looked for several statements or actions relating to moral issues before classifying a character. Also, to avoid seeing my own values in a statement when they were not there, I checked my classifications with another reader.

A Match Between Moral Level and Literary Level

Ideally, a story's moral sophistication and the complexity of language and plot should correspond. A story depicting characters at Stage IV engaged in a morally difficult dilemma can be fairly complex in plot and language and should have an adult setting; it should not give the impression of talking down to

the reader. Kohlberg and Turiel cite the use of a simple, concrete style for teaching high-level precepts as a classic error in moral education.

High Literary Quality

The above selection criteria – the presence of a genuine moral dilemma, familiarity of the problem, appropriate level of the dilemma, appropriate level of development of characters and a match between moral and literary level – can be summarized as the choice of a genuine dilemma at the right level. The dilemma is, of course, more interesting in a well-told story, and I did find some excellent literature that is concerned with moral choices. Universality and depth of theme are two criteria of literary excellence; so, it is not surprising that these qualities are found in company with other good literary qualities. Some stories and essays, however, are worthwhile in moral theme, but are not written with a high level of artistry. I feel justified in using them if they meet other criteria for a good dilemma and produce good writing assignments.

Four Examples

Among the novels that provide a basis for moral discussion, I will discuss three outstanding examples. The first, *Up a Road Slowly*, (Hunt) works well with a mixed-level audience because its heroine, Julie, progresses through several stages as she grows up. At twelve she must choose whether to please the town girls with a lovely party or to do "the right thing" and include Aggie Kilpin, who, in a word, stinks. Although Aunt Cordelia backs "the right thing" with an ultimatum, Julie refuses to invite Aggie. Years later, Julie must decide whether to please handsome Brett by writing much of his English homework or confront the fact that this is breaking the rules. She does as he wishes at first, but later ends the relationship. In the process, her conversations with her aunt, her teacher and Brett clearly reveal the dilemma.

Another young adult novel, *The Bronze Bow* (Speare), tells the story of Daniel, a young Galilean rebel, relating his attempts to balance family loyalties against his cause and showing his progressive disillusionment with Rosh, the rebel leader. Is he justified in leaving his needy sister to live in the hills and harass the Romans? Should he defy Rosh, his hero, when Rosh refuses to rescue a member of the band? The story presents several such dilemmas; each could be discussed as it arises and then compared to Daniel's solution. (Note: while the book makes no express theological claims, it presents the ministry of Jesus in some detail.

A third novel, *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* (Taylor), tells of a black family in Mississippi in the 1930s. Stacey Logan considers whether to tell Mama (also his teacher) that a schoolmate is cheating or to honor the juvenile code against tattling and deal with the offender himself. On a much more serious level, the family (and the black community) must decide whether to continue trading at the "company store" after its owner has gone unpunished for killing a black man. They decide, with terrible consequences, that justice requires them to boycott the store. In agonizing over their several decisions, the relatives present conflicts between Stages III and IV and give a rationale for Stage IV.

Other stories, while not directly presenting Stage III-Stage IV dilemmas, do offer an opportunity for the teacher to pose questions. In *The Chocolate War* (Cormier), for example, a clandestine "club" terrorizes both students and faculty. A teacher could ask, "Would you report a friend who was a member?" "Would you report that another friend was being harassed – even if he expressly forbade you to do so?" Such teacher-posed dilemmas extend considerably the range of stories that can be used.

These days when I read, I am always looking for moral issues my students can discuss. I have asked them what topics interest them and enlisted their aid in finding both stories and essays. As a result of our search, I am noticing insight into the authors' views, followed by original, individual response – in short, an active intellectual engagement in reading and writing.

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YA WRITERS ON WRITING

Sylvia Vardell
University of Houston-Victoria

From young children to sophisticated adult readers, we are curious and interested about the "creators" of the books we read. The mass quantity of personal letters received by authors is one very powerful indication of the reader's desire to know more, to ask questions, and to relate to the author and the work. Book flaps of the work itself are good places to look for information about the author, but often the reader wants to know more than the personal tidbits available on book jackets. Good sources of readily accessible information, such as interviews with authors and autobiographical writings, are available. What YA authors, themselves, say about their works and their writing can help provide more in-depth background for the work being studied. They can better reveal the author's intentions, supply insights into the author's relationship to the characters and themes of the work, and offer inspiration and clarification about the complex creative process involved in the business of writing. By way of example, consider the words of the following five popular authors of novels for young adult audiences: M. E. Kerr, Barbara Wersba, Paul Zindel, Isabelle Holland and Robert Cormier.

M. E. Kerr

"Once I received a letter from a kid doing a paper on M. E. Kerr.

'Why did you decide to name your pen?' he asked me.

I don't think my father's ERM stationery was the sole reason I began writing under a pen name. I think I was drawn to the idea I could create this separate identity for myself, and write about people I knew without them ever knowing who was telling their secrets.

Since nearly all of my pseudonyms were male, I must have also felt that a female wouldn't be taken seriously . . .

While I did do a few novels under my real name, I always felt better when I 'named my pen.'

When I named it M. E. Kerr, it was a play on my last name, (Meaker) and probably a hangover from the days when I felt, along with others, that a female writer wouldn't sell as well as a male would." (Kerr, 1983)

Barbara Wersba

"To be a writer you have to see the world for the first time and pretend you know nothing about it . . . Writing is a process of self-discovery . . . I write to find out who I am . . . Every book is yourself. You may disguise the characters, but they're all you and it's a very exciting experience for those who can stick with it . . .

My parents did not encourage me to write . . . I was a very poor student in everything except English. As a matter of fact, I wonder how I got through school at all . . . Actually, I don't think the influences of home or school matter at all. I think people are born writers . . . It seems to be a drive that comes from within . . . " (Janeczko, 1976b)

Paul Zindel

"I think the professional writer is aware of theme, aware of structure, aware of scenes; extensive notes and research are all taken ahead of time and then you must forget them. Then you have to allow the subconscious to operate and to allow all that material that you jammed into yourself to operate as though it were the influx of a day's activities. I know a girl who is thirteen-years-old who plans her dreams for the night. She likes to be kissed by boys. Usually, before she goes off to sleep . . . if she thinks about a problem or a situation prior to going to sleep, she will dream about it . . . Writing is primarily daydreaming; good writing is daydreaming with a technical basis." (Weiss, 1979)

Isabelle Holland

"The problem with talking about my writing is that most of it seems to be unconscious: I pretty

much make things up as I go along. . .I have tried the other method – making an outline, not only of the book, but each chapter. It is not difficult. There is no great mystique in drawing up an outline. The only trouble is, when I do, one of two things happen: I ignore the outline. Or I do not ignore it and try and work from it. Before very long I stop writing the novel, because the characters and story are so set, so well laid out, that, in effect, I've already written it, and the result for me is total boredom. There is nothing to find out, no unexpected turn of events. No unforseen characters drop onto the paper. The consequence is such tedium that I quit, tear up the outline and go back to an unmarked trail." (Holland, 1985)

Robert Cormier

"When I write, I never think of segments as chapters; I think of them as scenes. I always visualize them in my mind. Then I try to get the scene down on paper as closely as I can. That's the one thing that readers don't see – what you have in your mind. The reader can only see what you get on the page.

". . .I don't think I began to be a professional writer until I learned my weaknesses and what I couldn't do. This forced me to compensate. I use a lot of similes and metaphors when I work, simply because it's my best way of describing a building or a scene. . .Graham Greene showed me the use of metaphor to evoke emotion, scene, and place." (Silvey, 1985)

It can be interesting and informative to look at what authors *themselves* have to say about their ideas and their work. Of course, it is best to examine the entire interview to understand the context of their comments, but these brief excerpts might help convey a "feeling" for the personality of the author and provide an introduction to their work in the guise of a book-talk/author-plug. In fact, the following bibliography provides a rich resource for the potential linking of literature and language arts. It includes extensive interviews with YA authors (Silvey, 1985, even includes copies of Cormier's "messy" manuscript drafts which students may enjoy), as well as works by YA authors which include comments about their writing and about the writing process. Here is an avenue for better integration of reading and writing; for developing the connection between author and audience, composition and comprehension. In any case, students may be surprised by what they read, and, thus, a few more of them may be drawn into the world of books, authors and writing.

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400 Hahn Road
Westminster, MD 21157

"Meet the Newbery Author Series" filmstrip kits including profiles of Virginia Hamilton, Bette Green, Scott O'Dell)

"Young Adult Literature" audio cassette tapes (including interviews with Robert Cormier, Katherine Paterson)

PROFILES IN LITERATURE
Dr. Jaqueline Shachter Weiss
3023 De Kalb Blvd.
Norristown, PA 19401

"Children's Authors and Illustrators on Videocassette" (including interviews with Judy Blume, Jean Craighead George, Kristin Hunter)

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WHAT EVERY ENGLISH TEACHER SHOULD KNOW ABOUT FREE READING

Dick Abrahamson *Eleanor Tyson*
University of Houston

Americans are in love with lists. Newspapers, magazines and whole books are filled with lists of Best Dressed, Best Chocolates, Best Restaurants, Best Videos, Best Buys and Best Books. English teachers are expected to produce lists. One parent wants a list of recommended classics so that his teenager can get into Harvard. Another has a daughter who wants to "read for Wellesley." There are requests for Books for Bryn Mawr, Documents for Dartmouth and Classics for Cornell.

We all want to help our students get into Harvard or Yale and onto the road that leads to M.B.A.'s and careers in corporate law, if that's what they want. The question from an English teacher standpoint is: what books will help? Is there a magic list of books that ought to be read by youngsters pining for Princeton? The answer is **"no."**

In a recent study, Connie Epstein surveyed the English departments of the Ivy League and Seven Sister colleges and universities to see if she could provide teachers and librarians with "an up-to-date checklist of basic titles" (p. 32). Of those four schools that provided a list of ten specific titles, she found that no title appeared on all the lists, and "only *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen, *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens, *Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad and *A Room of One's Own* by Virginia Woolf are even mentioned twice" (p. 33). The finest quote comes from Arthur R. Gold, chair of the English department at Wellesley College who said, "I'd have secondary school teachers weigh books on a scale and award letter grades for reading done by the pound" (p. 32). There is no one list of books that unlocks the Ivy League door. In summing up her survey, Epstein writes, "Professors want students who care passionately about books rather than those who have learned the proper ones to have read; they want to encourage personal involvement" (p. 34).

Free reading is the best instructional technique the English teacher has to encourage personal involvement and reading done "by the pound." Like many other good things in education, free reading has been around for 80 years or more, and like most things in education, it goes in and out of style with the times. We think the time is right for the pendulum to swing back in favor of allowing youngsters to choose the books they want to read, read during English class, and have conferences on those selected books with their English teacher. This approach to books and reading has recently gotten an extra boost in a study done by Mary Livaudais. She asked 1,020 adolescents in grades 7-12 to rate several dozen activities that have been listed in professional journals as reading motivation activities for teens. Being allowed to choose any book that you want to read was selected by these teenagers as the number one reading motivation activity. We think it's time for English teachers to look again at free reading in the 1980s.

Many articles have been written on free reading during the last 80 years, but they have appeared in a wide variety of sources in publications to which many English teachers do not subscribe. We collected, read and evaluated all the articles and studies written on the subject. What follows is our annotated list of what we feel every English teacher ought to know/read about free reading.

RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FREE READING

1. Lou L. LaBrant, *An Evaluation of the Free Reading in Grades Ten, Eleven, and Twelve*, The Ohio State University Studies, Contributions in Education, No. 2, Ohio State University Press, 1936.

_____. The Use of Communication Media, in *The Guinea Pigs After Twenty Years*,

Margaret Willis (ed.), Ohio State University Press, 1961, pp. 127-64.

Although Dr. Lou LaBrant did not invent free reading, she is the person who popularized it and carried out some of the most quoted research on the effectiveness of this approach. LaBrant started with a group of tenth graders at the Ohio State University Lab School. Their literature program was free reading. They read what they wanted. LaBrant continued teaching these same students as they moved through grades 11 and 12. Throughout, the free reading literature program was used. Employing a very careful system of record keeping, she showed very clearly that these students read more books than they would have in a more structured, traditional, literature program.

What makes LaBrant's work especially impressive is that she kept track of these students long after they graduated from high school. She interviewed them years later, and her findings were published in *The Guinea Pigs After Twenty Years*. There were two very impressive findings. First, she found that her guinea pigs, as adults, did markedly more reading than most other groups of adults examined. That is, free reading helped to create active, adult readers. Her second finding, perhaps more important, was that her grown students expressed a strong concern for, and were active participants in, the development of their children's reading habits. The guinea pigs as adults read to and with their children, took trips to the library and encouraged their children to pick books that keyed into their individual interests. The concern for the child's attitude toward books and reading was not just the province of the mothers responding to LaBrant's study. As the researcher writes, "In general, it may be said that all of the thirteen fathers seemed to accept responsibility for reading habits as a part of family living" (p. 156).

These are impressive results. LaBrant's pioneering work deserves to be looked at again by English teachers in the 1980s. We certainly want students to become adults who read and find recreational value in books. We also want parents who take an active role in their child's reading habits and attitudes toward books. This research points to free reading as a way of achieving these two important goals.

2. Bruce C. Appleby, The Effects of Individualized Reading On Certain Aspects of Literature Study with High School Seniors, Doctoral dissertation, The University of Iowa, 1967.

_____, Individualized Reading in the Literature Program, ED 018 411, ERIC, 1967.

_____, Individualized Reading as Environment for the Literary Experience, in *The Creative Teacher*, William Evans (ed.).

One of the best doctoral studies on the effectiveness of free reading was done by Appleby. Ley (see #5) summarizes the Appleby research this way:

> He compared differences which existed among three groups: 65 high school seniors at four different ability levels enrolled in a one semester individualized reading course; 65 seniors at four different ability levels who wanted to take the individualized reading course but were not taking it; and 65 seniors at four different ability levels who were taking a required, traditional literature course.
>
> Appleby discovered that the individualized reading 'accomplished the objectives of a literature program as well as, if not better than, other types of literature instruction.' No differences favored the control groups over the individualized reading group. Perhaps most important, students who had been enrolled in individualized reading showed more positive attitudes toward fiction and more satisfaction with literary experience than did those in the control groups. Such positive attitudes and satisfactions are, of course, fundamental to establishing the habit of lifetime personal reading. (Ley, 1979, p. 25)

In addition to the dissertation itself, Appleby has written about the results in two articles teachers may wish to consult – Individualized Reading in the

Literature Program and Individualized Reading as Environment for the Literary Experience.

3. Harrison J. Means, Nine Years of Individualized Reading, *Journal of Reading*, November 1976, pp. 144-49.

Professionals in The University of Iowa Lab School followed in the footsteps of Lou LaBrant and began an elective program in individualized reading. Means analyzed 18 semesters of reading records of students enrolled in that Iowa program. He found that these 309 sophomores, juniors and seniors read..."largely popular adult fiction" (p. 148). Secondly,..."contrary to publishers' statements and library records which show nonfiction to be what most people read, high school readers show a strong preference for fiction when allowed to select freely in individualized reading" (p. 148). Means found that this type of free reading program encouraged extensive reading. Students averaged reading 12 books per semester. That represents a significant increase over the amount of literature read in a traditional English program.

HOW TO SET UP AND EVALUATE A FREE READING PROGRAM

4. Barbara Blow, Individualized Reading a Course of Study for a One Semester Elective Course at Cedar Falls Senior High, Cedar Falls, Iowa, ED 088 029, ERIC, 1974.

This document is the most complete guide available on how to structure an individualized reading program. The booklet is filled with teacher/student forms, conference questions, handouts and a very explicit grading procedure. This really is the "nuts and bolts" of setting up a free reading program. Blow's program is based on a semester long course of study. We think every teacher considering a free reading program of any time duration should read this guide from cover to cover.

5. Terry C. Ley, Getting Kids Into Books – The Importance of Individualized Reading, *Media and Methods*, March 1979, pp. 22-25.

_____, How to Set Up and Evaluate a DIR Program, *Media and Methods*, April 1979, pp. 133-139.

Two articles by Ley present fine overviews of the why and how of Direct Individualized Reading. In the first article, Getting Kids into Books, Ley makes a readable case for English teachers restructuring their traditional literature programs. Statistics from the National Opinion Research Center suggest that we are not creating many lifetime readers. He cites studies that show citizens of the United States read fewer books than our counterparts in Great Britain, France, Germany, Holland, Switzerland and the Scandanavian countries. Half of the adults in the U.S. have never read a book all the way through. "Less than one in five adults could name a book they would like to read" (p. 22). After giving those sobering statistics, Ley goes on to describe the positive benefits of DIR.

In his companion article in the April issue of *Media and Methods*, he describes specific ways to implement the program. He looks at the amount of time devoted to DIR, useful lists of books that have teen appeal, how to have successful teacher/student conferences and how to evaluate the program and assign student grades. These two articles are especially useful to the teacher who wants to get some administrative support or the department chairperson who wants to provide his/her teachers with a quick overview of the whys and hows of free reading.

6. Kenneth L. Donelson. Free Reading: Another View, *Journal of Reading*, April 1969, pp. 545-48 & 606-11.

As teachers begin to consider implementing a free reading program, a good deal of attention needs to be placed on how long to run such a unit. Many of the programs, like the one used at The University of Iowa Lab School and the program detailed in the course of study designed by Blow, operate on a semester basis. Many teachers do not have the flexibility to spend that amount of time on free reading. Donelson argues that a three to five week block is a good way to try free reading. He recommends that

the program not begin until the teacher knows each of the students – perhaps by the sixth or seventh week in the semester.

Donelson correctly points to the importance of reading ladders in free reading programs. He writes, "The free reading program assumes that the teacher must keep working, always tactfully and surreptitiously, for growth in reading skills, in reading levels and in reading tastes" (p. 547). He traces a possible reading ladder of a girl who loves to read romances from the lower rung featuring Anne Emery's *Sorority Girl* up the rungs to Mary Stoltz's *To Tell Your Love* on to *Gone with the Wind, Jane Eyre, Wuthering Heights* and *Anna Karenina* at the top. Tactful and surreptitious teacher guidance over time is the key here.

Donelson concludes his article by summing up the advantages to free reading that he observed as he used this approach in his own high school classroom.

1. Students enjoyed reading, sometimes for the first time and often in spite of the fact that they read little outside school. they read more books than they ever had before, and generally they did go upward in reading ability and taste.
2. The techniques of literature came alive to my students in a way that was new and promising. When they could see that authors made different choices for different reasons and these choices could be exciting to explore, the literary process came alive.
3. I had to work like the devil to keep students supplied with books, and I had to keep up with the new books coming out, and I enjoyed myself. (p. 611)

In addition to the time allotted to free reading, the next frequently asked question deals with how to grade students. Blow presents a sensible approach to grading. Ley and Donelson also offer suggestions. Perhaps the most quoted article on grading free reading is Appleby and Conner's Well What Did You Think About It?

7. Bruce C. Appleby and John W. Conner, Well What Did You Think About It? *English Journal*, October 1965 pp. 606-12.

The Appleby-Conner grading system includes three criteria: number of books read, quality of conferences and bookcards and the difficulty level of each book. The students in their free reading classes helped to develop this scheme. Here's an explanation of the system:

1. Number of books read. This measure alone is unrealiable in that books vary so greatly in length and difficulty. Nevertheless, the students have always felt that quantity of reading is important.
2. Number of books is multiplied by an estimate of the student's perceptiveness into what he has read. The student is graded on the conference and card on a cumulative 1 to 4 scale: 1 – no understanding beyond plot; 2 – some application to his own life; 3 – some implications for larger human ideas; 4 – understanding of levels of meaning, esthetic values, and relationships with other reading.
3. The product of criteria one and two is multiplied by an estimate of the level of the book. Each book is given a numerical rating on the following scale:

Adolescent		Popular Adult	Serious Adult	Classic
1	2	3	4	5

By multiplication of the three factors, a student reading adolescent materials which he understands completely may achieve as high a grade as one who reads serious adult materials which he does not completely understand. (p. 610)

The authors are quick to point out that their scale is completely movable. That is, a book like Michener's *Texas* might be considered serious adult reading for an eighth grader, but popular adult reading for an 11th grade student.

THE PLACE OF FREE READING IN JUNIOR HIGH/MIDDLE SCHOOL

More often than not, professionals discuss free reading as part of the high school English program. This technique is equally valid and important at the junior high/middle school level.

8. Ben Nelms, Reading for Pleasure in the Junior High School, *English Journal,* September 1966, pp. 676-81.

Nelms outlines a junior high reading program that has three components. First, there should be lots of books available and time for browsing in classroom libraries or book displays borrowed from the main library. Secondly, there should be, "a program of free, individualized reading" (p. 679). Third, there ought to be a program that includes . . . "the in-class study of selected pieces of literature that should be coordinated with the free reading program" (p. 679). He sees the study of books that the whole class will read growing out of student comments during the teacher/student conferences that are so important to free reading. If students are reading free choice books about wanderers, then perhaps *Huckleberry Finn* or the *Odyssey* might be the books the entire class would read.

Nelms's article helps place free reading within the overall literature curriculum. It also shows how free reading can be the driving force for the other necessary elements in the junior high English program.

9. Richard F. Abrahamson, Free Reading and Individualized Reading Instruction: A Successful Combination for the Middle School, in *Structuring for Success in the English Classroom: Classroom Practices in Teaching English,* NCTE 1982, pp. 145-151.

The author makes the point that middle school teachers often come from two different teacher training programs; some are products of elementary teacher preparation programs and others are from secondary teacher programs. To elementary teachers, individualized reading means teaching reading skills to youngsters using student selected books. Secondary teachers are more apt to have had the free reading concept presented to them as a part of teaching English. One is an approach to reading, and one is a literature education strategy. Abrahamson suggests that a blending of the two strategies is a fruitful approach for many middle school readers who still may need reading skill instruction as well as reading guidance to move up individual reading interest ladders. He presents a model for blending the two techniques together.

10. Martha Booth, Memo to English Teachers Re: Individualized Reading, *English Journal,* December 1970, pp. 1276-1278.

Finally, there is the question of how students like free reading. Many of the articles mentioned above include statistics of how popular free is with junior high and high school students. Many suggest that the great benefit of free reading is that youngsters find this approach to books and reading so much more enjoyable than the traditional one-novel-read-by-the-whole-class approach.

Martha Booth asked 225 high school students who had taken a course in free reading to write comments about the course. She found that students mentioned four strong points in their evaluations:

1. The freedom to select what they read. (A look at books read indicates that the reading was varied, from easy to difficult, from recent to the classic of the past.)
2. The lack of teacher domination.
3. The significance of the conference. (In the conference the 'teacher could tell me what she thought without trying to change my ideas.' Here the teacher emerged as a person with whom the student could talk, a pleasant surprise for many students.)
4. The improvement of reading skill. (Mentioned by a surprising number of students, skill improvement is purely a side effect. How much of such "improvement" is really attitude change, I wonder.) (p. 1277)

If all of the research cited in the articles above is still not enough to convince you or your administra-

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FIFTY YA BOOKS OUT OF THE PAST STILL WORTH READING; or, Enjoyment Is There *if* You Search for It

Ken Donelson
Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona

Those of us who take YA books seriously know that we must keep up-to-date in our reading as the printing presses spew out the good and the bad (and everything in between) almost daily. What we sometimes forget in our panic to read the latest book is that YA literature has been with us for a long time, and some of those older books deserve to be read today by young people (and maybe even us). But if we don't know them and recommend them, no one is going to read them. That's also one of our responsibilities, one we sometimes ignore or forget.

Granted, we have little reason to worry about the fate of Cormier's *The Chocolate War* or Childress' *A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich* or LeGuin's "Earthsea" trilogy or Peck's *A Day No Pigs Would Die* or Zindel's *The Pigman*. Those books are safely entrenched in our thoughts and our students' lists of good novels and in the standard reference works. But books as recent as those, books as fine as Southall's *Josh* or Hunt's *No Promises in the Wind* or Renvoize's *A Wild Thing*, also deserve our attention and are unhappily more neglected than read. And other novels, equally fine, gather dust for no other reason than that they are not well known to current readers. Surely, if we don't know and recommend these books, young people will see only the dust or note only that no one has checked these books out for several years, and that is enough reason for kids to ignore the books.

Below is a list of fifty books (and I left off several favorites to arrive at this lovely, round number) that I'd recommend today. Some of them have been almost totally forgotten, some merely neglected, but all are worth reading. Read a few (or all) to see if you don't find an old favorite, long forgotten, or a title new to you and old to the world that deserves more than one reader now. Try it – you might like it, and I'm sure readers will have other titles to add to their own favorites of the past. I've divided them into four historical periods.

The Nineteenth Century:

1. Alcott, Louisa May. **Little Women** (1868, 1869). The March family sans father, has daughters who have warmth and love to fill the world.
2. Bennett, John. **Master Skylark: A Story of Shakespeare's Time** (1897). Young Nick Attwood admires and envies actors and sets out for Coventry to see a play, only to be kidnapped for his wonderful singing voice.
3. Falkner, John Meade. **Moonfleet** (1898). Fifteen-year-old John Trenchard's life in a rotting, dull seaport changes after he discovers a band of smugglers and a diamond with a curse and learns what prison life can be like. A classic adventure story.
4. Janvier, Thomas A. **The Aztec Treasure-House** (1890). An anthropologist, a priest, a metallurgist, a clerk and an Indian boy set out to find treasure amidst a latter-day band of Aztecs in a wonderful and often amusing adventure story, full of mystery and danger.
5. Pyle, Howard. **Otto of the Silver Hand** (1888). Otto, son of one of the robber barons in medieval Germany, loses his hand to an enemy and has it replaced with one made of silver. A powerful and harsh story by a fine writer.

1900-1941:

6. Allee, Marjorie. **The Great Tradition** (1937). Merritt Lane, a farm girl, and her room-

mates at the University of Chicago learn what it means to love science. An early and quiet feminist work.

7. Armer, Laura Adams. **Waterless Mountain** (1931). A sensitive and slow-moving portrait of a Navajo boy training to become a Medicine Priest. Never properly appreciated, possibly because it won a Newbery Award.
8. Ellsberg, Edward. **Hell on Ice** (1938). This book is a recreation of the 1879 North Pole expedition in horrifying and graphic detail with almost unbelievable episodes of nature's indifference to humanity's plight.
9. Lane, Rose Wilder. **Let the Hurricane Roar** (1933 – reissued in 1967 as **The Young Pioneers**). A newly-married young couple take off for the Dakotas in the 1870s. Everything that could go wrong does in an unsentimentalized and honest picture of young adults facing believable problems together.
10. Montgomery, Lucy Maud. **Anne of Green Gables** (1908). Anne Shirley is grudgingly taken in by a crusty brother and sister when they order a boy from the orphanage to help on the farm and get Anne instead. No goody-goody girl but irrepressible and lively, Anne changes their lives. One of those rare and delightful novels every generation rediscovers – or should.
11. Robinson, Mabel. **Bright Island** (1937). Thankful Curtis grows up on her beloved family island off the Maine coast. Sent to mainland school, she's a curiosity to other students, but her spunk and honesty win over the others. This is a remarkable and wonderful novel, one almost forgotten. It deserves far better.
12. Wiggins, Kate Douglas. **Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm** (1904). The too-cheerful title may turn off some readers, but they'd be advised to read about eternally optimistic Rebecca before judging the book or the main character. It is similar to Montgomery's **Anne of Green Gables** in delighting succeeding generations.

1942-1966:

13. Annixter, Paul. **Swiftwater** (1950). Bucky Calloway's improvident father keeps the family on the verge of disaster, but Bucky and his father share a common dream – to establish a wildlife refuge in Northern Maine.
14. Bennett, Jack. **The Hawk Alone** (1965). African white hunter, Gord Vance, discovers that he's a walking anachronism. Once valued as friend and hunter, Vance now lives mostly in his memories.
15. Chute, Marchette. **The Wonderful Winter** (1954). Treated like a child by his three aunts, young Sir Robert Wakefield runs off to London, becomes an actor and plays in the first production of **Romeo and Juliet.**
16. Cunningham, Julia. **Dorp Dead** (1965). Gilly Ground is placed in a foster home of a ladder-maker who makes Gilly his psychological slave. A strange book – early critics delighted in calling it *controversial* (whatever that means), but powerful and haunting.
17. Daly, Maureen. **Seventeenth Summer** (1942). A favorite for years and still read by more students than teachers or librarians may think. Some critics have puzzled over Angie's innocent love for Jack. Others admire the book, as I do, for its quiet charm and portrait of a time and place, now lost.
18. Davis, Russell. **Anything for a Friend** (1963). Clarence would do anything to get closer to dream woman Arabella, but what she asks him to do – almost single-handedly to integrate the school prom – perplexes Clarence. A remarkable, and very funny, study of an innocent boy manipulated into doing what is right for lots of the wrong reasons.
19. Hentoff, Nat. **Jazz Country** (1965). Hentoff's first and best YA novel may be guilty, as Hentoff has said, of being unduly innocent and unerotic, but it's also a fine story of a young white musician trying desperately to enter the black world of jazz.
20. Merrill, Jean. **The Pushcart War** (1964). A witty and always entertaining satire, nominally the history of the New York City war between pushcart vendors and truck drivers in 1986, with delightful characters like General Anna and Morris the Florist.

21. O'Dell, Scott. **The King's Fifth** (1966). Arguably the best of O'Dell's historical novels, **The King's Fifth** is a first-person narrative of cartographer Estában de Sandoval as he awaits trial for defrauding the King of Spain. His journey for gold in the New World is even more a journey toward self-discovery.
22. Stolz, Mary. **Pray Love, Remember** (1954). Popular Dody Jenks has everything going for her, except her self-awareness of her essential coldness. The finest of the magical Stolz novels, for years the best of all YA writers.
23. Sutcliff, Rosemary. **The Eagle of the Ninth** (1954). First of her Roman Britain novels, this focuses on a wounded young Roman centurian, Marcus, who learns the Eagle standard of his father's Ninth Legion may have fallen into barbarian hands. No historical novelist for young adults has done more to bring history and believable historical people alive.

1967-1974:

24. Alexander, Lloyd. **The Book of Three** (1964), **The Black Cauldron** (1965), **The Castle of Llyr** (1966), **Taran Wanderer** (1967) and **The High King** (1968). No one has helped to make fantasy more delightful and exciting than Alexander's Prydain quintet about Taran, the assistant pig-keeper, and his war against evil.
25. Childress, Alice. **A Hero Ain't Nothin' but a Sandwich** (1973). Childress's multifaced and multi-narrated novel about drug-addict Benjie and his quietly heroic would-be father, Butler, is simply put, a masterpiece.
26. Clements, Bruce. **The Face of Abraham Candle** (1969). Young Abraham sets out in 1893 on a treasure hunt among the cliff caves in Mesa Verde and finds something more important than mere wealth.
27. Cormier, Robert. **The Chocolate War** (1974). Probably the best known YA novel and a book that approaches the status of a YA classic.
28. Donovan, John. **Wild in the World** (1971). A boy watches the death of his entire family on an isolated farm and finds a dog with whom he can share his life and grief. An incredible story of death, which I find more compelling every time I read it.
29. Forman, James. **Ceremony of Innocence** (1970). Based on fact, a brother and sister stand up to Nazism in World War II Germany and die for their beliefs. The story is stark and brilliant.
30. Fox, Paula. **The Slave Dancer** (1973). A powerful indictment of racial prejudice and inhumanity as a boy is kidnapped to play the fife aboard a slave ship and thus keep the slaves physically trim and better able to bring a good price at the slave auction.
31. Garfield, Leon. **The Sound of Coaches** (1974). A droll and lively account of an orphan and his search for his heritage. Garfield is, for me, the great YA writer of our time, and his books bear repeated readings.
32. Garner, Alan. **The Owl Service** (1967). The finest of all YA fantasies. Based on the legend of Blodenweddin in the Welsh collection of myths, **The Mabinogian.** Garner's novel tells of three young people who discover a set of dishes with a strange pattern which involves the youngsters in a tale of love and mystery and jealousy.
33. Hall, Lynn. **Sticks and Stones** (1972). Two young men strike up a friendship in a small town where gossip and envy make friendships like theirs impossible. A perceptive study of small towns and human meanness.
34. Hamilton, Virginia. **Zeely** (1967). A young girl sees the strikingly beautiful Zeely and fantasizes that Zeely is descended from Watusi royalty. An early and too little read book by one of our finest writers.
35. Hunt, Irene. **No Promises in the Wind** (1970). A 15-year-old and his brother leave their Chicago home during the Depression to see if the rest of the world can be as bad. Generally, it is. The boys find tragedy and pain and a bit of love. Why this fine book remains so little known has always been a mystery to me.
36. Johnson, A. E. (Annabel and Edgar Johnson). **A Blues I Can Whistle** (1969). The Johnsons' best book by far, a study of Cody who botched his suicide attempt and is now trying to figure

out why he tried to kill himself.

37. Kerr, M. E. **If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?** (1973). Handsome, popular, cool Alan Bennett watches his life fall apart. Kerr's best book.
38. LeGuin, Ursula. **A Wizard of Earthsea** (1968), **The Tombs of Atuan** (1971) and **The Farthest Shore** (1971). This trilogy is a word-magic fantasy of wizard Ged, his childish prank that calls forth an evil power and his quest to find who he and the evil shadow are. Magnificent reading for anyone who likes great writing.
39. Mazer, Norma Fox. **A Figure of Speech** (1973). One of her best, and most overlooked, books, this tells of 13-year-old Jenny who believes that her family does not want her. When her beloved grandfather also feels he is no longer needed, the two set out for his old farm and safety.
40. Ney, John. **Ox: The Story of a Kid at the Top** (1970). Franklin Olmstead (Ox) is fat, rich and ignored by his father. When Ox is assigned at school to write a composition on cows, his father and some socialite friends decide to fly around with Ox searching for cows. People like this book – and others in the series – or they hate it. I like it very much.
41. Peck, Robert Newton. **A Day No Pigs Would Die** (1972). Deservedly loved and read, and Peck's best book. Rob finds cruelty and death and humor and love – especially love – on his father's farm during the Depression.
42. Pope, Elizabeth Marie. **The Perilous Gard** (1974). Kathryn Sutton falls into disfavor in Queen Elizabeth I's court and is sent to strange Elvenwood Hall, where she finds a world that is both magical and evil. A brilliant historical fantasy that successfully encompasses both worlds.
43. Renvoize, Jean. **A Wild Thing** (1971). Morag escapes her most recent foster home to live alone in the Scottish highlands. Her privacy and independence are broached when she saves the life of an injured man who inadvertently causes her death. One of the truly great YA novels.
44. Sleator, William. **House of Stairs** (1974). Five 16-year-old orphans are mysteriously gathered together in a maze made up of stairs and a food machine which pays off when they behave in certain ways. This story is a Skinnerian nightmare.
45. Southall, Ivan. **Josh** (1971). When Josh spends a week with his Aunt Clara at the Plowman homestead in Australia, he finds that a few days in the country are more than enough to confuse him about the rules and ways of country folk. A fine initiation novel by a too-little known (in this country) Australian novelist.
46. Tunis, John. **His Enemy, His Friend** (1967). Jean-Paul idolizes a German soldier and soccer player in World War II occupied France. When the soldier is ordered to execute six townspeople in reprisal for the death of a German officer, Jean-Paul feels bitterness. Ten years later and after the soldier has served time in prison, an international soccer match pits Jean-Paul and his French team against the German and his team, and tragedy strikes. A great book, both for sports (and Tunis excelled at writing about sports) and morality.
47. Wersba, Barbara. **Run Softly, Go Fast** (1970). After his father's funeral, David Marks tries to determine how and why his relationship with his father deteriorated. Wersba's best novel.
48. White, Robb. **Deathwatch** (1972). The book is the finest and most sustained YA adventure story. Ben sets out as a guide to lead Madec to good hunting, but when Madec accidently kills a desert prospector, Ben finds that he is now the quarry.
49. Wojciechowska, Maia. **A Single Light** (1968). A deaf-and-dumb girl, eager for love and rejected by her superstitious townspeople, believes she is cursed when a baby left in her care dies. She finds a marble statue of the Christ child to love, and it becomes her solace against an unfeeling world until people learn that the statue is a valuable relic.
50. Zindel, Paul. **The Pigman** (1968). Zindel's best book. It's a treat to return to this book and see again Zindel's talent and sensitivity.

NON-FICTION
NEWS FROM ALAN AND BEYOND

The ALAN Breakfast and Business Meeting

The annual meeting of ALAN will be held during the NCTE Convention in conjunction with a breakfast on Saturday, November 22, at 7:30 a.m. in the Alamo Ballroom Salon of the San Antonio Marriott Hotel. The ALAN Award for outstanding contribution to Adolescent Literature will be presented to Madeleine L'Engle, Newbery Award winning author of *A Wrinkle in Time*, *The Arm of the Starfish*, *The Young Unicorns* and *A Ring of Endless Light*. Following the breakfast another Newbery Award winning author Virginia Hamilton will speak. Hamilton's books include *M.C. Higgins the Great*, *Zeely*, *The Planet of Junior Brown* and *A Little Love*. Complimentary copies of her novels will be given to breakfast guests. Tickets for the full breakfast may be obtained by sending a $10 check, payable to ALAN, to Ted Hipple, Department of Curriculum and Instruction, 301 Claxton Education Building, University of Tennessee, Knoxville, TN 37996-3400. **Note: Mail Deadline is November 5. No tickets will be available for sale in San Antonio.**

Awards

In Summer Light, written by Zibby Oneal and published by Viking Kestral, received the Boston Globe-Horn Book Award for Excellence in Children's fiction. One of the judges described its style as "absolutely perfect." It is the story of Kate, who, during a long, languid summer, struggles with both her relationship with her father, a brilliant painter, and her conflicting feelings about her own artistic talent. (See Clip and File Reviews, *ALAN Review*, Winter 1986.)

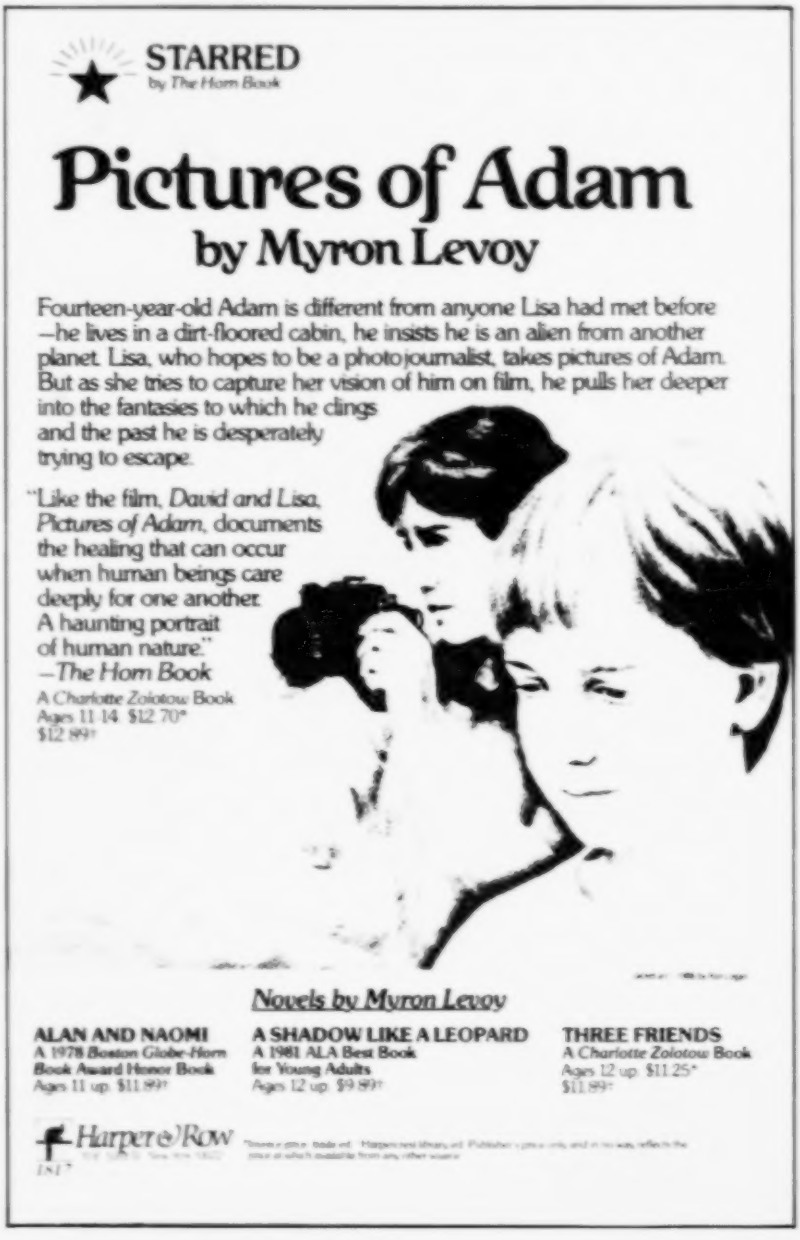
Also cited as honor books were: *Prairie Songs* by Pam Conrad, published by Harper & Row, (See Clip and File Reviews, this issue.) and *Howl's Moving Castle* by Diana Wynne Jones, published by Greenwillow.

The best non-fiction award went to *Auks, Rocks and the Odd Dinosaur: Inside Stories from the Smithsonian* by Peggy Thomson, published by T.Y. Crowell. *Dark Harvest: Migrant Farmworkers in America* by Brent Ashabranner with illustrations and photographs by Paul Conklin, published by Dodd, Mead, was also cited for honors.

The NCTE Standing Committee on Research has named Amy McClure, Ohio Weslyan University, as one of its two Promising Researchers for 1986. McClure's study, done under the direction of Charlotte Huck, Ohio State University, is entitled "Children's Responses to Poetry in a Supportive Literary Context."

Each year NCTE makes available approximately 15 Teacher-Reseacher Grants with a ceiling of $1,000. These grants are for classroom-based research of elementary and secondary teachers. None of the 15 grants awarded in 1986 are directed toward the teaching of literature. To apply for a 1987 grant write for information: Teacher-Researcher Grants, Research Foundation, NCTE, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801. Deadline for applications for next year's competition is February 15, 1987.

Ten $10,000 research grants-in-aid for advanced research in improving the teaching of English are available through the NCTE Research Founda-


STARRED
by The Horn Book
Pictures of Adam
by Myron Levoy
Fourteen-year-old Adam is different from anyone Lisa had met before —he lives in a dirt-floored cabin, he insists he is an alien from another planet. Lisa, who hopes to be a photojournalist, takes pictures of Adam. But as she tries to capture her vision of him on film, he pulls her deeper into the fantasies to which he clings and the past he is desperately trying to escape.
"Like the film, David and Lisa, Pictures of Adam, documents the healing that can occur when human beings care deeply for one another. A haunting portrait of human nature."
—The Horn Book
A Charlotte Zolotow Book
Ages 11-14 $12.70*
$12.89†
Novels by Myron Levoy
ALAN AND NAOMI
A 1978 Boston Globe-Horn Book Award Honor Book
Ages 11 up $11.89†
A SHADOW LIKE A LEOPARD
A 1981 ALA Best Book for Young Adults
Ages 12 up $9.89†
THREE FRIENDS
A Charlotte Zolotow Book
Ages 12 up $11.25*
$11.89†
Harper & Row

tion. The deadline for applications for next year's grants is February 15, 1987. For information and application forms, write NCTE Research Foundation, 1111 Kenyon Road, Urbana, IL 61801.

The Children's Literature Association announces three scholarships for 1987. The Margaret P. Esmonde Memorial Scholarship is a $500 award for proposals that deal with critical or original work in the areas of fantasy or science fiction for children or adolescents. This award is made to an "entry level" scholar.

The ChLA Research Scholarship is an annual $1,000 award for a proposal dealing with criticism or original scholarship with the expectation that the undertaking will lead to publication and make a significant contribution to the field of children's literature in the areas of scholarship and criticism.

Weston Woods offers a $500 stipend for ChLA members to encourage scholarly investigation into the elements and techniques that contribute to the successful adaptation of children's literature into media. Guidelines for all three awards can be obtained from Jeanie Watson, Chair, English Department, Rhodes College, 2000 North Parkway, Memphis, TN 38112.

The ChLA Awards Committee is calling for nominations for the literary criticism books award. Nominations should be of books by single or dual authorship published in the last 2-3 years. Please send nominations to Roderick McGillis, Department of English, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta, T2N 1N4, Canada.

New from Publishers

Facts on File announces a "one-stop reference for children's literature, *The International Directory of Children's Literature*, edited by Mary Beth Dunhouse." The $29.95 hardbound edition covers 84 countries and over 45 languages, listing over 3500 addresses of: children's books and magazine publisher organizations, fairs and conferences, prizes, and major children's libraries and collections.

Alleen Pace Nilsen has authored an interesting new book entitled *Presenting M. E. Kerr*, published by Twayne as part of their Young Adult Author Series. (This book joins the first book in the series *Presenting Robert Cormier* by Patricia J. Campbell, discussed in Non-Fiction: New from ALAN and Beyond, *The ALAN Review*, Winter 1986, p. 68.) Nilsen's book represents the first critical study of M. E. Kerr's popular fiction for young adults. The book, which is entertaining and enlightening, first introduces readers to Marijane Meaker, the real M. E. Kerr. Nilsen analyzes Kerr's work as a storyteller, writer and teacher. This book is a must for fans of Kerr's books and is another example of the newfound literary acceptability of young adult literature. The book which costs $13.95 can be ordered from G. K. Hall, 70 Lincoln St., Boston, MA 02111-2685.

For those of us who think beautiful children's picture books are for all age readers, Marcia Brown has written *Lotus Seeds: Children, Pictures and Books* (Charles Scribner's Sons). This book is a collection of speeches given by illustrator and author Brown concerning children, pictures and books. The lovely book ($13.95) is gloriously illustrated with Brown's Chinese style pen and ink drawings. It is a little treasure for those of us who value quality picture books for children of all ages.

To subscribe to The British Council's quarterly *Children's Books* send a check for $21, payable to Basil Blackwell, to Iris Taylor, Basil Blackwell, 108 Crowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF England. The journal includes articles about books and authors, reviews of over 150 books, booklists, interviews, illustrations from new releases and much more.

News from NCTE

Past President of ALAN Robert Small of Virginia Tech was elected chair of the 1986-87 NCTE Nominating Committee.

The next editor of the *English Journal* will be Ben Nelms, professor of English education at the University of Missouri. The associate editor will be Beth Nelms, a teacher of English at David H. Hickman High School, Columbia, Missouri. The Nelms, who will succeed Ken Donelson and Alleen Nilsen in September 1987, are the current adolescent literature editors of the *English Journal*. Ben Nelms edited *English Education* from 1972 to 1978. His research interests include: tenth-graders' responses to poetry, children's fantasy from 1850-1950 and fiction written for adolescents since 1942.

Conferences

Don't forget to register for the 76th Annual NCTE Convention in San Antonio, Texas, November 21-26.

Call for Papers

The International WHIM (World Humor and Irony Membership) Humor Conference will be held from April 1 to April 5, 1987 at Arizona State University in Tempe. A one-page proposal on any aspect of "International Humor" should be sent before January 15, 1987 to: Don L. F. Nilsen, English Department, Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ 85287.

Send articles on teaching children's literature – both to children and to university students – ten to 15 pages double-spaced, conforming to the newly revised MLA format, by March 2, 1987, for a special issue of *Children's Literature Association Quarterly* in memory of Carol Gay to: Thomas Gay, Department of English, Youngstown State University, Youngstown, OH 44555.

The Children's Literature Association is calling for papers for the Modern Language Association Meetings, San Francisco, CA, December 27-30, 1987. The ten minute presentations should be on theoretical and critical approaches to children's literature written before 1850 or "Non-fiction, Faction, and Fiction: Personal and Public History in Children's Literature." Submit queries, two-page abstracts to Frances F. Foster, San Diego State University, San Diego, CA 92102 by January 31, 1987.

From the Report of the NCTE Commission on Literature by Darwin Turner, University of Iowa.

"In the secondary schools, the commission sees an excessive desire to make sure that students believe literature can be fun. We perceive a tendency to select books that are popular with teenagers, an assumption that to make literature enjoyable, it's necessary to choose easy reading – books that don't require students to develop the ability to analyze literature. It's a question of whether class time should be spent discussing such books. Teenagers could read them independently and grasp their meaning. . . .

The commission had mixed views about the idea of establishing a "core" list of works for all students to study – a concept favored by Secretary of Education William Bennett. On one hand, members of the commission applauded the concept that students should be encouraged to read literature of high quality. On the other hand, they feared that some educators who might propose a single list would prepare that list mechanically and arbitrarily, rather than thoughtfully. They were concerned that such a canon might follow previous practices of honoring works of white male authors of the past without expanding to include 20th century works of artistic value and significance by minorities and women."

Commentary

DARE A TEACHER DISTURB THE UNIVERSE? OR EVEN EAT A PEACH? CLOSET CENSORSHIP: ITS PREVENTION AND CURE

James E. Davis
Ohio University
Athens, Ohio

Letters from countries where censorship is practiced quite regularly bear the government stamped "Uncensored" on the envelope. This offers symbolically a profound insight into the nature of censorship: censors do not want to admit that they censor. Ideally, they would like to get all of us to be self-censors so that no censorship would appear to be imposed from without. Call this a kind of "friendly censorship," or perhaps "sweet reason" censorship. The tree is there in the Garden of Eden with big fruity peaches or apples, or whatever, and eating of it can make you, or your students, **KNOW**, but you don't pick from it or eat from it. Self-censorship is open and dangerous and sometimes heroic, while the battle against self-censorship is anonymous, lonely and unwitnessed – a source of humiliation and shame for the collaborator.

Self-censorship means reading and selecting literature through someone else's eyes and with someone else's values. You attribute to this imaginary censor faculties which you yourself do not possess, and to the text a significance it does not have. Thus anything and everything can look censorable. The censoring inpulse is in all of us, according to Arnold Rosenfeld, "There must be a gene for it embedded somewhere among our chromosomes, darkly lurking, not unlike cancer, awaiting the chemical signal that suggests action" (*Dayton Daily News*, May 15, 1983). Or, in the case of the closet censor – inaction.

Author Danilo Kis says it is possible to win out against this internal cancer. And your own fears and insecurities can paralyze you, rendering you unable to make a decision. (*New York Times Book Review*, November 3, 1985).

It is this paralysis of the will that I mainly want to discuss in this article. Obviously, I use the literary allusion of Eliot's J. Alfred Prufrock, wondering if he cares and if he dares to disturb the universe or even eat a Peach. Substitute apple and we can be in the Garden of Eden talking about the forbidden fruit. The censor's utopia is surely Eden before the fall, or perhaps it is B.F. Skinner's Walden II, where citizens are trained to wear lollipops around their necks, but not to eat them. Eventually, they don't even want to eat them. This is the ultimate goal of self-censorship – beyond freedom and dignity. Call this eternal bliss. Or call intellectual freedom thought crime and censorship reality control or doublethink as Orwell did in 1984.

Censorship today is geometrically on the increase. The organized support of censorship for social and political reasons is appalling and intensely frightening. If it continues to go unreported and unchallenged (and all self-censorship goes unreported), its effects will be even more far-reaching than the chill it casts on public school classrooms and libraries.

I make no bones about the risks in breaking silence and speaking out against censorship. As Alan Glatthorn put it: "We will be pilloried and slandered. We may suffer physical violence. And we may lose our jobs. But the costs of remaining silent are even greater. If we capitulate to the forces of censorship, the foundation of liberty will have eroded. And in

the process we will have lost our souls" (*Dealing with Censorship*, NCTE, 1979, p. 53).

Back to the "chill factor." Closet censors are chilled to the bone of absolute zero – non-movement, frigidity. What is at stake in censorship struggles is the teacher's ability to teach and the learner's right to learn. Norma and Mel Gabler are attacking both the teacher's right to teach and the student's right to learn. They say things like, "As long as the schools continue to teach ABNORMAL ATTITUDES and ALIEN thoughts, we caution parents NOT to urge their children to pursue high grades in class discussion, because the harder students work, the greater their chance of brainwashing" (Educational Research Analysts, Inc., Handbook No. 1).

And so is Jerry Falwell attacking freedom to teach and learn. He says, "I hope I live to see the day when, as in the early days of our country, we won't have any public schools. The churches will have taken them over again and Christians will be running them." "(Textbooks) are nothing more than Soviet propaganda. . . . Parents should raise up in arms to throw out every textbook" (*America Can Be Saved*, p. 53).

The Reverend Tim La Haye says in one of his "battle" books: "Modern Public education is the most dangerous single force in a child's life: religiously, sexually, economically, patriotically, and physically" (*The Battle for the Family*, p. 89).

And the Gablers once more: "When a student reads in a math book that there are no absolutes, suddenly each value that he has been taught is destroyed. And the next thing you know, the student turns to crime and drugs." The Gablers use the straw man of secular humanism to try to make Prufrocks of us all: "Allowing a student to come to his own conclusions about abstract concepts creates frustrations. Ideas, situation ethics, values, anti-God humanism – that's what schools are teaching – and concepts. Well, a concept never will do anyone as much good as a fact" (*American School Boards Journal*, June 1979).

But the data and quotations I have been using are about and from overt, direct censors – censors we can attack directly, even in kind. What increasingly concerns me is the covert self-censorship brought on by the chill factor – censorship which is so hard to find out about, much less confront. Such "dare I eat a peach" statements as these which came anonymously from teachers on a recent questionnaire:

"This is a conservative area and books are considered in this light before they are placed on the shelf. We have few problems. One elementary book (still on the shelf) has ten damns. Books on evolution are somewhat touchy."

"Books for curriculum and library are carefully previewed in advance by committee to avoid problems."

"Judy Blume books bother me! I've watched kids passing one around the room so everyone could read certain pages – pages on which any values in the book were not evident!"

"We are fortunate to have librarians who know the material ordered – if there is a chance material will be offensive in our community, it is not ordered."

"The community is moderately conservative – the faculty selections have generally considered community expectations prior to use of any title."

"We eliminate material that might be objectionable (ex. – If a magazine has a suggestive cover, it is not put out for students use.) The librarian at the high school or the district librarian makes this determination."

"We have a very homogeneous population of Amish/Mennonite people in this area; therefore, selections are made with their value system in mind. There are many books that I would buy unhesitatingly for an urban area that I do not consider for purchase here; such as *Are You There God, It's Me Margaret* (Blume)."

"About seven years ago when I taught summer enrichment courses the superintendent "requested" that I not use a book I was planning to have students read and discuss – *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* – because there were portions that could be misunderstood. I complied."

"I feel censorship does have its place in a school system, but I do not think it should be narrow and constricting in application."

"Since ours is a very fundamentalist area, we (the English department) do some 'self-censorship' watching out for possible problems. . . . We also are

adaptable in our curriculum for the student who because of religion, etc., does not watch films and read some books. Please note we do not have a library. . . ."

"Personally, I do not believe in any form of censorship at the high school level. We've had no problems, however, simply because our teachers know that there would be repercussions if we used any material that would be considered inappropriate by our fundamentalist community."

There are many dangers in this kind of orthodoxy. In Orwell's 1984 "orthodoxy means not thinking – not needing to think. Orthodoxy is unconsciousness." Orthodoxy is to close the book. One of the U.S. Supreme Court Justices in a recent case, talks about censorship resulting in a "pall of orthodoxy." One of the functions of literature in a free society is to help protect us from this "pall of orthodoxy."

We have heard from censors in the spirit of closing books; it is high time that we hear from anti-censors, in this case of modern American authors in defense of opening books: JUDY BLUME – "I see a tendency for adults who can't control everything that's happening in their lives to try to control their children's lives. One place to begin is by controlling your child's reading. But you can't control another human being's life, another human being's thoughts. Even if you removed all objectionable (to censors) books from the schools and libraries, you can't stop children from thinking about the things written in those books. The fear that children's values will change because they are exposed to other values isn't valid if there is communication between parent and child. Let children read whatever they want and then talk about it with them. If parents and kids can talk together, we won't have as much censorship because we won't have as much fear. Parents who believe that their children have the right to read, the right to information, the right to know, must become as vocal as the vocal minority" (Barbara Karlin, Blume Speaks Out on Speaking Out, *Los Angeles Times*, Oct. 18, 1981).

STUDS TERKLE – "The important thing is to read and develop your own sense of morality" (Erie, *Pennsylvania Times*, February 2, 1982).

LLOYD ALEXANDER – "Literature is more important than any one of its practitioners. Its strength lies in its diversity. Small wonder that dictators burn books before they do likewise to people who disagree with them. And each book is a human statement and we need those differences. The society where only one opinion is acceptable, where conformity and docility are the highest virtues, is the cultural equivalent of an Egg McMuffin" (Comments at the American Booksellers Association meeting in Anaheim, *San Diego Union*, June 20, 1982).

JUDITH GUEST – "I think what appears to be lack of trust in others – in their ability to interpret and decide for themselves – is, in fact, a lack of trust in one's own beliefs: that, somehow, when they are stacked up against an alien or threatening idea, they won't be able to hold their own. But they MUST. Or, sooner or later, they will fall. That is the way the world changes, and without change, there is neither truth nor growth: there is only fear, hypocrisy, and deadness of spirit. When you withhold information from people, what you are protecting them from is maturity. The person shielded from the knowledge of the world is the person who is doomed never to grow up" (Address to NCTE Spring Conference in Minneapolis, April, 1982).

And finally, NORMA KLEIN – "If this continues, we will have no books that kids want to read. I believe children and adolescents are keenly aware of the hypocrisy around them. Juveniles search for honesty in literature. . . . If we censor our books and stop writing about the feelings that are so important to these children, we are betraying them" (*Education Week*, September 19, 1984).

I believe that if we think and work constructively together most censorship – public and closet – can be prevented before it starts. Some suggested strategies: (1) Every school system should have written policies for the selection of library books, textbooks, etc. (2) the selection policy should be well-publicized and well-understood by the community. (3) The school system should have a written procedure for handling complaints. (4) These should be followed to the letter. (5) A written statement of the school system's curriculum, goals and philosophy of education should be available to the community. How textbooks, library books and other instructional materials are selected to help meet those goals

should be carefully explained. (6) If a teacher or librarian is accused of teaching or disseminating "objectionable" material, that person should be fully apprised of the charge at the earliest possible moment. (7) School personnel should recognize that "secular humanism" is a catch-all charge that can – and usually does – cover anything that school critics want it to. (8) The school board should never give up its legal rights. Citizens' pressure groups have a right to express their views to the board. But nowhere is it written that their views should dictate – or take precedence over – board policy. (9) Teachers, board members, administrators should be well-educated as to the vocabulary of the New Right as well as its agenda for public education. (10) School officials, librarians, teachers and parents should become familiar with textbook and library book "reviews" prepared by the Gablers of Texas and distributed by a number of national and local organizations including the Moral Majority, the Eagle Forum and the Pro-Family Forum. (Gabler materials have been used to spark controversies in all 50 states.) (11) Students should not be isolated from the controversy; learning how controversies are created, as well as how they are resolved, can – and should be – an education in democracy for everyone involved.

The right to learn is always in danger. The battle for intellectual freedom must be waged again and again, and this is true not only publically with the obvious reactionaries, but privately, internally as well. Isaac Asimov imagines an America that is "super-patriotic, super-respectable – with only certain narrow points of view defined as either patriotic or respectable. Imagine a society gray and humorless, with views that are identical from sea to shining sea, and with nothing otherwise permitted. Imagine an America compressed – narrow – single viewed – ignorant. There have been many such societies in history. It won't happen here? Of course not, if the movement toward it is stopped. But the further it advances, the harder it will be to stop, and the best time to stop it is at the beginning – NOW!" (*Columbus Dispatch*, May 2, 1982).

Don't be afraid to eat a peach or even occasionally to disturb the universe!

YA Books in the Classroom, continued from page 40

Kohlberg, Lawrence and Elliot Turiel. Moral Development and Moral Education. In G. S. Lesser, ed. **Psychology and Educational Practice**. Scott, Foresman, 1971, pp. 410-465.

Speare, Elizabeth George. **The Bronze Bow**. Houghton Mifflin, 1961.

Taylor, Mildred. **Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry**. Dial, 1974.

Free Reading, continued from page 58

tor of free reading's merit as a strategy for teaching literature, let us end by giving the students in Martha Booth's classes the final word. Here's how three of them ended their evaluations:

> 1. This is the best English course I've taken. I learned just as much about style, theme, and literature in general as in a structured course. . . . If I had my choice I'd take the course again, but it's not allowed. Maybe by hiring more teachers they could offer the course to more students.
> 2. Well, to start with, you wouldn't believe how much better I've been reading. By this I mean words per minute and more understanding of what I've read. . . . I never used to read at all but now that I've discovered the type of book I like, I enjoy reading and don't mind sharing it with others.
> 3. My interest in the novel has increased and there is a long list of novels recommended by my friends that I hope to read later on. (p. 1277)

Free reading allows students to read books "by the pound." It creates students "who care passionately about books rather than those who have learned the proper ones to have read. . . ." (Epstein, p. 34).

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Livaudais, Mary. A Survey of Secondary (Grades 7-12) Students' Attitudes Toward Reading Motivational Activities. Unpublished Doctoral dissertation, University of Houston, 1985.

LIBRARY CONNECTIONS

Edited by Donald J. Kenney
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
Blacksburg, Virginia

Helping young adults select books is not an easy task. But somehow, knowing that the books appear on a "best list" can be reassuring. But all too often we tend to take these so-called best books lists at face value. Do we know who selected them? Do we know the process of selection? Do we know the criteria for selection?

This issue's column is devoted to one such list – the American Library Association's Best Books for Young Adults. As a member of the ALA committee that helps select the books for the 1985 list, the author offers some inciteful observations in the selection process of this best books list.

BEST BOOKS FOR YOUNG ADULTS, 1985

Betty Carter
University of Houston

The close of every calendar year inevitably brings forth someone's best and worst list for the previous 12 months: *People Magazine's* 25 most interesting personalities, Gene Siskel's ten favorite movies and *Esquire's* Dubious Achievement Awards, to name only a few. The processes of compiling these lists vary from generating idiosyncratic choices to making thoughful decisions. Assessing the quality of each requires that we know the validity of the judgments.

Of special interest to ALAN readers is the American Library Association's annual Best Books For Young Adults list. Popular with both teachers and students, this yearly publication enjoys high visibility in schools and libraries. But the processes of placing books on the list, and the responsibilities of the committee that chooses them, are often unfamiliar to English teachers.

Final books are determined by a committee composed of 15 public and school librarians who are members of ALA's Young Adult Services Division. Geographically spread across the country, these members serve single, two year terms. Appointments are made on a staggered basis and geographically spread across the country. Sally Estes, YA editor for *Booklist*, serves as permanent consultant for the committee.

The responsibilities of these 15 librarians is simply to read all that is published during the current calendar year that is appropriate for readers in grades seven - 12. This commitment usually involves evaluating around 400 juvenile and adult titles annually. In addition, most committee members actively seek the opinions of teenagers in either structured programs or informal book discussions. Books worthy of nomination, for either proven or potential worth to young adults, are suggested by both committee members and interested professionals in the field.

During the American Library Association's midwinter convention all nominated titles are discussed in open forums. Librarians, teachers, parents and teenagers attend these meetings, freely offering opinions on their favorite and not so favorite books. The committee publicly debates each nomination, for seldom do all members agree on any one title. A book wildly popular in one area of the country may bomb in another. One member will find technical mistakes that alluded the others, and no two people ever agree on what is best or age-appropriate for young adults. After four frantic days of last minute

reading and trading viewpoints, a tense, silent vote is held. Those books that receive eight or more positive votes are placed on the final list.

The 1985 list, selected late in January of 1986, has 58 titles, culled from 278 nominated books. Although the 35 young adult selections and 23 adult works form an interesting mixture in terms of difficulty, the lion's share of the list, or 43 books, are fiction.

Several such as *The Moves Make the Man* (Bruce Brooks, Harper & Row), *Half-Nelson/Full Nelson* (Bruce Stone, Harper & Row), *Emergence* (David Palmer, Bantam), *Dead Birds Singing* (Marc Talbot, Little, Brown), and *Cold Sassy Tree* (Olive Burns, Ticknor & Fields), are first novels, but veteran authors are also well represented. *I Stay Near You* by M. E. Kerr (Haper & Row), *Remembering the Good Times* by Richard Peck (Delacorte), *One-way to Ansonia* by Judie Angell (Bradbury) and *Sara Will* by Sue Ellen Bridgers (Harper & Row) all appear as 1985 Best Books.

Since the list inevitably follows publishing trends, some topics repeat in multiple titles. Family conflict, always a popular subject with adolescents, provides the basis for several of the most intricate books of the 1985 season. The question of incest is couched in Hadly Irwin's love story *Abby, My Love* (McElderry), but is the central focus of Patricia Hermes's *A Solitary Secret* (Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich). *Maddy's Song* (Margaret Dickinson, Houghton Mifflin), an adult novel about a musically gifted high school girl who along with her mother, brothers and sisters suffers her father's physical abuse, is more complex.

In other novels fathers occupy central roles, but certainly not as abusers. Seventeen-year-old Kate draws away from her famous parent's influence as she begins to develop her own artistic style in Zibby Oneal's *In Summer Light* (Viking). And both high school student Steve Michaels, better known as *Wart, Son of Toad* (Alden Carter, Pacer/Putnam), and his biology teacher father break established patterns to find new goals in their once empty lives.

Mother-daughter relationships also receive special attention in two diverse, but equally powerful works. Jamaica Kincaid's *Annie John* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux) portrays a mother letting go and severing the restrictive bonds of childhood. *Julie's Daughter* by Colby Rodwosky (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), looks at the other side of the coin as 17-year-old Slug goes to live with her mother, a stranger who abandoned her as an infant. Tiptoeing around each others lives, the two find a common bond in caring for terminally ill Harper Teggs, a demanding and willful woman who must accept her own life in order to face death.

The subject of nuclear war, of persisting concern to both adolescents and adults, receives historical perspective in Peter Wyden's *Day One* (Simon & Schuster), a highly technical and detailed account of the development and use of the first atom bomb. More speculative, Whitley Strieber's *Wolf of Shadows* (Knopf), carries the reader south with a young woman, her daughter and a pack of wolves, as they leave the immediate area of a three megaton hit and move together through the frozen nuclear winter looking for food and warmth.

Another odyssey occurs in David Brin's *The Postman* (Bantam). Dressed in a postal uniform from the now destroyed government of the United States, Gordon Krantz wanders through the far west delivering letters and hope as he perpetuates the fraud that some bureaucratic structure still exists in the aftermath of devastation. The survivors of David Palmer's bio-nuclear war are neither animals nor lucky humans, but rather a superior form of mankind – *homo post homineum*, who possess not only genius intelligence, but also natural immunity to the disease spawned by war. Written as eleven-year-old Candy's diary, *Emergence* (Bantam) parallels her adolescent awakening with the world's rebirth and survival.

Less familiar in form are Louise Lawrence's mutants, evolving from *Children of the Dust* (Harper & Row), or the first group of survivors of a nuclear war. Particularly accessible to a wide range of young adults, this novel covers three generations of one family, and the role each plays in making a new and different place for the next.

Past wars also received attention on the 1985 list. J. B. Ballard's *Empire of the Sun* (Simon & Schuster) describes a WW II Shanghi prison camp through the eyes of eleven-year-old Jim; *Cranes at Dusk* (Hisako Matsubara, Doubleday/Dial) provides a view of occupied Japan; and *Auschwitz: True Tales From a Grotesque Land* (University of North Carolina

Press) recounts the horrors of author Sara Nomberg-Przyk, forced to work with Dr. Josef Mengele.

Dear America: Letters Home From Vietnam (W. W. Norton) personalizes that war for this generation. The horrors, the ugliness, the pettiness and the small triumphs of American service personnel serving on the front lines, in hospitals and POW camps are all shared in their letters home. While many of us still search for an understanding of that period, few do so with the intensity of Sam from Bobbie Ann Mason's *In Country* (Harper & Row). A contemporary high school senior, she needs her father's memory, long dead with him in southeast Asia, to find out who she is. Along with her paternal grandmother and Uncle Emmett, a living victim of Viet Nam, Sam travels to the Veteran's Memorial in Washington to touch her father's name, her past and her heritage. Milton Meltzer's *Ain't Gonna Study War No More* (Harper & Row) brings the topic of war full circle. A history of conscientious objectors in America, the book is neither a dry recitation of facts nor a collection of insipid biographies. It's nonfiction at its best, and reaffirms Meltzer as its master.

All of the biographies on the current list are adult, and each deals with a struggle, but there the commonalities end. *FDR's Splendid Deception* (Hugh Gallagher, Dodd, Mead) offers an interesting slant to Roosevelt's life by concentrating on the effects of his disability, and the massive cover-up from his inner circle of advisors who concealed the severity of his handicap from the American public. Dorothy Greenbaum (*Lovestrong*, Time Books) pays tribute to her own tenacity and supportive family when she finally becomes a doctor, after battling sexual prejudice and personal guilt from juggling the separate roles of student, wife and mother. And veterinarian Dr. Rory Foster, otherwise known as *Dr. Wildlife* (Franklin Watts), establishes a clinic for animals orphaned or hurt in the wild, but does so in the face of government opposition to his practice and private exploitation of animals. Rounding out the biographies are *Yeager* (Yeager & Janos, Bantam), an honest luck and pluck story; *The Amateurs* (David Halberstam, William Morrow), an in-depth look at America's Olympic rowing team; and, *Boy* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux), Roald Dahl's autobiographical view of childhood.

These categories show only part of the list. Informational pop-ups appear for the first time in Jonathan Miller's *The Facts of Life* (Viking) and Heather Cooper and David Pelham's *The Universe* (Random House). The diversity that is nonfiction characterizes such titles as Peter Parnell's personalized study of hawks in *The Daywatchers* (Macmillan), Sue Burchard's chronological history of *The Statue of Liberty* (Harcourt, Brace Jovanovich), James North's saga through South Africa in *Freedom Rising* (Macmillan) and Timothy Ferris's glossy collection of *Spaceshots: The Beauty of Nature Beyond Earth* (Pantheon).

Since these annual choices are dependent on what's available in one year, no overt attempt is made to balance the list. This year, however, there seems to be a little something for everyone: *Dogsong* (Gary Paulsen, Bradbury) and *Hit and Run* (Joan Phipson, Atheneum) for hearty adventurers, *Ender's Game* (Orson Scott Card, Tor) for science fiction fans, *Singularity* (William Sleator, E.P. Dutton) and *The Woman Who Loved Reindeer* (Meredith Ann Pierce, Atlantic Monthly Press) for fantasy readers. *On the Edge* (Gillian Cross, Holiday House) for mystery buffs, *Pocket Poems* (Paul Janeczko, Bradbury) for poetry collectors and *Be Buried In the Rain* (Barbara Michaels, Atheneum) for romance lovers.

Best Books For Young Adults – 1985 is history. Annotated brochures can be ordered from The American Library Association/50 East Huron/Chicago, Illinois 60611. Single lists are .30 and multiple copy discounts are available. Camera ready sheets, intended for mass duplication are also available at $5.00.

Most BBYA committee members left the midwinter convention reading books for consideration for the 1986 list. But 15 librarians, no matter how dedicated, cannot find and evaluate all those special books that "sing to the soul" of a young adult. And that's where I hope ALAN members will help. Nominations for the next list may come from outside the committee. The only requirements for field suggestions are that books be original publications from 1986, that they have proven or potential worth to young adults, and that they be made on the accompanying nomination form by midnight, October 31, 1986. If a community of professionals from within ALAN's ranks and ALA's membership would join

forces to identify the best books available, the end product can only be an outstanding list of titles for teenage reading.

American Library Association
Young Adult Services Division
BEST BOOKS FOR
YOUNG ADULTS (BBYA)
Suggestion Form 1986

Any book suggested for BBYA committee consideration must be published between January 1, 1986 and December 31, 1986. Current BBYA committee members only may nominate books published between September 1 and December 31, 1985 if not previously considered. All nominations must be submitted to the BBYA committee chairperson no later than November 1, 1986.

Every book suggested must be read by the person making the nomination. Each suggested title will be considered and voted upon by the Committee at the ALA Midwinter Meeting in January, 1987.

Please bear in mind that criteria guiding the committee's final selection:

"Selection to this list is based primarily on the proven or potential appeal and worth of each book to young adult readers. Titles chosen must also meet the following standards:

Fiction must have believable characterizations and dialogue and plausible plot development.

Non-fiction must have accurate information, an appealing format and a readable text."

Please complete the following information for each title suggested and send to:

Betty Carter
2310 Lexford Lane
Houston, Texas 77080

AUTHOR _____

TITLE _____

PUBLISHER _____
PUBLICATION DATE
(Month, if possible, and year) _____

FICTION _____ NON-FICTION _____

Brief one or two sentence annotation describing the book:

_____

_____

Brief statement explaining why you think this is a candidate for Best Books:

_____

_____

NAME AND LIBRARY AFFILIATION _____

From the Report of the NCTE Commission on English Curriculum by Eileen Lundy, University of Texas at San Antonio.

"The good news about the English curriculum today is the convergence of interest in applying research on response to literature in the classroom. We understand more today about how children learn to read, and about the experience and abilities both children and adults bring to reading, in order to make sense from words on the page.

This new awareness of the relationship between the reader and the text is producing a strong trend toward better teaching of literature. Instead of pretending that all of the meaning is there on the page for the student to decode, we are paying attention to the student's response. We recognize that the reader actually recreates a piece of literature. Writing is now seen as an aid to reading. We see how learning to compose enhances one's ability to understand what another writer is trying to do."

From the Report of the NCTE Commission on Reading by Dorothy J. Watson, University of Missouri, Columbia.

"We desperately need to devise ways to assess learning that are consistent with sound learning theory and research. The best English language arts programs today use whole language methods to develop literacy in children, but these programs are tested on a skills model of literacy. . . .

Children's reading is being measured on the basis of whether they can pick out diphthongs and medial consonants in words or find the main idea in a paragraph. Teachers know they should have children read real books, discuss them, write from their own experience, and talk about the crafts of writing and reading. But because of the pressures of tests, they are obliged to ask their students to read from basal readers and drill on workbook skills instead."

"Now that you asked. . ."

Ruth Cline
University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado
Elizabeth Poe
Arvada West High School, Jefferson County, Colorado

We have been asked how teachers can help students develop an appreciation for different kinds of humor in literature.

Since a sense of humor is credited with contributing to a long life, happy marriage and balanced perspective, as well as richer appreciation for the humorous aspects of literature, our students' appreciation of humor deserves nurturing. Appreciation of the humor found in the language, characters and situations of literature can be developed by building on aural experiences with jokes, funny stories or witty remarks and media experiences with television, motion pictures or radio, as well as reading experiences involving comic strips, magazines or literary works. Utilizing humorous literature written at various levels of difficulty or sophistication can lead students to appreciate literary humor that might otherwise remain elusive.

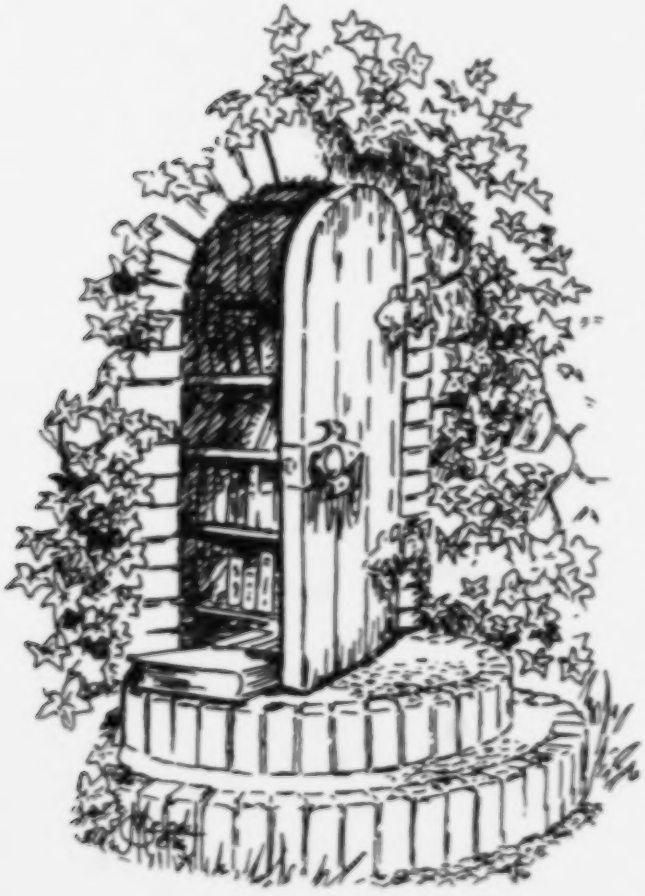
When dealing with humorous uses of language, an appreciation for the peculiar utterances of someone like Mrs. Malaprop in *The Rivals* (Sheridan, 1974) or the witty repartee among characters in a Shakespearean comedy can be developed through references to or analysis of literature for children or adolescents which employ similar conventions in a manner more readily accessible to contemporary adolescents. Childish puns and jokes like those found in *Ghastly Ghostly Riddles* (Miklowitz, 1977) – "What do ghosts ride at amusement parks? Roller ghosters!" – may evoke groans from teenagers, but they clearly demonstrate the humor in consciously misused language. Amelia Bedelia's (Parish, 1963) literal adherence to written instructions which results in her dusting the furniture by sprinkling it with dusting powder represents the humor in unconscious misunderstanding of language.

Linda in *Can You Sue Your Parents for Malpractice* (Danzinger, 1979) practices for a career as a stand-up comic by telling jokes – like the one about the rodent who almost drowned but his brother saved him by mouse to mouse resuscitation. Danzinger's characters, like those of Zindel, Conford, Spinelli, Sharmat, Kerr and other YA authors, amuse the reader with humorous first person narration and clever dialogue. Harry, the narrator in *Harry & Hortense at Hormone High* (Zindel, 1984), explains that if he called the school by its real name, "the Board of Education would probably come after us and knock us off by making us eat three consecutive monosodium glutamate Mongolian chop sueys in the school cafeteria." Wealthy Skye Pennington in *Gentlehands* (Kerr, 1978) tells Buddy Boyle he looks like a waiter because he is dressed all in white. The embarrassed Buddy quickly replies, "The fish is fluke." "You're the fluke," is Skye's playful retort. By examining clever uses of language such as these, students may increase their appreciation for humor in children's and young adult literature, as well as build a foundation for appreciation of humor in more sophisticated literature.

This same approach is applicable to developing an appreciation for the humor manifested through literary characters and situations. Children's and YA literature is rich with material which can help students develop their appreciation of humor in literature.

Authors' Note: "Now that you asked. . ." is a column devoted to answering the questions of readers who wish information on young adult literature and its authors, or about the teaching and publishing of this literature. Send questions to: Ruth Cline, School of Education, Box 249, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO 80309.

THE BACK DOOR



The late summer sun burns my body as I sit in my beach chair, feet dangling in the surf, reading a weighty best-seller. But, in spite of the long, lazy August afternoon, my mind flies to another day, less than a week in the future. School starts next Monday.

As I finish reading page 527 of the 900+ page book I have been wading through this summer, a warm brisk breeze turns its pages, making me lose my place. A dozen loose pages fly into the surf, like gulls diving for a catch. If the pages were from the first half of the book, I would give them their freedom. But, alas, I have not read them yet, and I intend to finish this tome before school begins. I jump from my chair to rescue the wet pages from surf and sand. Finally, retrieving the last of them, I lay them in the sun to dry. If it were June, the incident would pass without comment. But it is August, so all such events take on new meaning. I turn to my husband and ask rhetorically, "Can you believe how poorly books are made today?"

This is not a new observation, but one that takes on increased significance as I ready myself to begin a new term. I try to encourage my students to build their own libraries, but at every turn the "throw-away" society defeats me. The university bookstore buys their used textbooks at the end of the semester and sells them to other students at the beginning of the next. The pages in hardcover books no longer age gracefully; they turn yellow before the book goes out of print, which happens far too rapidly. And, paperbacks are the worst culprits. Each is physically obsolete the day the cover is cracked by the first reader. By the time they have been read by one person, they are suitable for only the trash.

I understand some of the reasons for this. Books, book publishing and book manufacturing are expensive. Students can't afford to hang on to the $29.95 textbook, nor can they afford to buy unused copies and, instead, read around and over someone else's yellow highlights. Used book buying and selling is a big business. Dozens of buyers come to my office door and those of my colleagues each year to entice us to sell our unused or overused books. Publishers cannot afford to warehouse books for more than three years; not only is space expensive, but the IRS considers unsold books a taxable asset. The high cost of paper has lead to the see-through page and tiny print that cannot be read by people over 40.

I understand these problems. However, I worry that my students have not and will not experience the pleasures of a personal library. I know people say that the book will become obsolete, but, somehow a microfiche chip is not nearly as sensuous as a beautiful old book. Certainly, a classroom of teen-

agers will not become excited when the box of new books on microfiche arrive on the teacher's desk.

I also worry about the books that are never discovered or become out-of-date before a new generation has the opportunity to love them. Charlotte Zolotow, an editor at Harper & Row, said in an interview with Robert Lipsyte, "It's no longer true that a good novel will be given time to find its audience through the careful nurturing of school libraries."

Returning from the beach to our rented apartment, I discover a book that needs nurturing and love. My husband, who has just finished his summer tome, is searching for a book to read in the apartment's small collection, left by other summer visitors. From the shelf he pulls the book *True Grit*. "Have you read this?" he asks. I haven't. He talks about it with great enthusiasm. I decide the wet pages of my best-seller can wait a few hours while I experience a book I have yet to discover.

True Grit, written by Charles Portis in 1968, is the story of 14-year-old Mattie Ross who attempts to avenge her Daddy's violent death. Mattie Ross is a wonderful character; her intelligence and bravery make her a model for adolescent women in 1986. How have I failed to discover this wonderful book before today? Have my students discovered Mattie? Is the book still in print? The jacket cover proclaims, "*True Grit* is eccentric, cool, straight and unflinching, like Mattie herself, who tells the story . . . with a voice that sounds strong and sure enough to outlast us all. It is a voice never quite heard before and at the same time instantly recognizable as totally original and totally alive." The jacket cover is right. I must find a way to give this book the nuturing it needs. For like all wonderful books, it will give me far more in return.

This first edition copy of the book is 18-years-old and in remarkably good shape, in spite of the fact that it obviously has been read by numerous readers. I wouldn't be surprised if it has spent many hours on the beach. However, the pages remain thick and white. The print is easy to read, and the stitched binding holds the book neatly against its cover. No pages are missing. The physical book has passed the test of time; it has not became a victim of the "throw-away" society.

And, Mattie the character, is a woman not only of the 1870s, but of the 1980s. In her early years she won many awards; and scholars (Donelson and Nilsen, for example) still list her as one of the best young adult books of all times.

Is there any way adults who care about what young people read can make a statement about the physical characteristics of books that are published? I think there is. Likewise, can we ensure the preservation of books which should be nurtured and loved? I intend to try. I plan to rescue books by chasing them down and introducing my students to those wonderful old books that they have failed to discover. I'll begin with *True Grit* and continue with the ones Ken Donelson lists in his article "Fifty YA Books Out of the Past Still Worth Reading; or, Enjoyment is There *if* You Search for It" (pp.). I also plan to complain about the quality of the books I buy. After all, how else can I expect future generations to discover the books I leave behind in libraries, classrooms and rented beachfront apartments?

Charlie

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